



**The integration of the cultural dimensions in the management of
international markets: The Covet case.**

M^a Teresa Alves Miranda Valente Garrido

**Internship report
Master in Intercultural studies for business**

“Versão Final”

**INSTITUTO SUPERIOR DE CONTABILIDADE E ADMINISTRAÇÃO DO PORTO
INSTITUTO POLITÉCNICO DO PORTO**



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Internship report

**Presented to Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto for the
attainment of a master's degree in Intercultural Studies for Business under the
supervision of Professora Especialista Laura Tallone**

Porto – 2019

**INSTITUTO SUPERIOR DE CONTABILIDADE E ADMINISTRAÇÃO DO PORTO
INSTITUTO POLITÉCNICO DO PORTO**

Resumo:

O presente relatório diz respeito ao estágio curricular, inserido no Mestrado Intercultural Studies for Business do Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto. O estágio foi realizado na empresa Covet Group, na marca Maison Valentina.

Após uma contextualização do sector do móvel em Portugal, onde o Covet Group se insere, o relatório descreve a minha experiência enquanto estagiária, através de um relato minucioso sobre a empresa e sobre as suas práticas gerais e de estágio. Este será feito recorrendo a opiniões pessoais, relatos e gráficos. Posteriormente será feita uma argumentação teórica que aborda a dualidade da influência americana e portuguesa na empresa. Dois autores serão referenciados, Hofstede e Trompenaars/ Hampden-Turner cujas teorias se interligam com os temas abordados no presente relatório.

Palavras-chave: Covet Group, Maison Valentina, Mobiliário, Gestão

Abstract:

The present report is related to the curriculum internship, conducted within the ambit of the Master's Programme in Intercultural Studies for Business of the "Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto". The internship took place in the company "Covet Group", more specifically in the brand Maison Valentina.

After a contextualization of the furniture sector in Portugal, where the Covet Group operates, the report will describe my experience as a trainee, through a detailed report about the company and its general practises. This will be done by using my opinion, figures and graphs. Following this part, there will be a theoretical argumentation, talks about the duality of the American and Portuguese influence. Two authors will be mentioned, Hofstede and Trompenaars/Hampden-Turner, whose theories connect to the topics mentioned in this report.

Key words: Covet Group, Maison Valentina, Furniture, Management

Dedication

In memory of my grandfather, José Garrido, who has passed away on the present year.

Thank you for all the wonderful years we had together and for always supporting me.

It is not a goodbye, it's a see you again.

Em memória do meu avô, José Garrido, que faleceu no presente ano.

Obrigada por todos os anos maravilhosos que tivemos e por todo o teu apoio.

Não é um adeus, é um até já.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my parents for all the constant support and love. I could not have done this without you, I am very grateful to you for the person I am today.

To my brother, for all the moments we share, thank you for your support and motivation, I know I can always count on you for the good and the bad.

To the rest of my family, a special thank you as well.

To my report supervisor, Dra Laura Tallone for all the support and availability.

To all my friends, with a special thank you to Ana Marques for all the patience and reassurance in difficult times.

I would like to thank the Covet Group for the opportunity it provided me, which contributed greatly to my personal and professional growth. A special thank you to Catarina Ferrão for the management of my internship process.

A heartfelt thank you to all of Maison Valentina's team, Sérgio Oliveira, Rebecca Ferreira, Flávia Martins, Diogo Miranda, Susana Ramos, Marta Moura, Carina Ferreira and Taras Yatsula for all the affection and support during the time of my internship. To all my other colleagues I met during my time in Covet Group, a special thank you as well.

List of Abbreviations

AEP- Associação Empresarial de Portugal

AIMMP- Associação das Indústrias de Madeira e Mobiliário de Portugal

APIMA- Associação Portuguesa das Indústrias de Mobiliário e Afins

ATO- Assemble to Order

CEO- Chief Executive Officer

COO- Chief Operating Officer

CRM- Customer relationship management

EC- European Centre

EU- European Union

GDP- Gross Domestic Product

GVA- Gross Value Added

IDV- Individualism

IMM- internationale möbelmesse

ISCAP- Instituto Superior de contabilidade e Administração

ISH- Messe Frankfurt Exhibition

MOM- Maison & Object and More

MV- Maison Valentina

NYC- New York City

OM- Oficina da Marca

p- Page

PDI- Power Distance Index

UAI-Uncertainty Avoidance Index

UK- United Kingdom

USA- United States of America

VS- Versus

Table of Contents

Chapter I - Introduction	1
Chapter II– The Covet Group within the context of the Portuguese furniture sector	5
2.1 The Portuguese Furniture Market	6
2.2 Significance of Furniture Manufacturing in the Portuguese Industry	10
2.3 Creation and evolution of the Covet Group	12
2.4 From Menina Design to Covet Group.....	13
2.4.1 Organizational chart	14
2.4.2 Corporate Organization	19
2.4.3 Covet Town	20
2.4.4 Trainee Program	21
2.4.5 Covet Foundation and other initiatives.....	22
2.4.6 Fairs and Missions	23
2.5 Maison Valentina	24
2.5.1 Brand Organization.....	26
Chapter III – The Internship.....	27
3.1 Work	28
3.2 Time-frame of the internship	29
3.3 Training:.....	30
3.4 Introduction to the Marketing team	31
3.5 Introduction to the brands	32
3.6 Introduction to selling terminology	32
3.7 Introduction to ATO	33
3.8 Platforms: MOM and ArchiExpo	33
3.9 Salesforce:.....	34

3.10	Fairs:	35
3.11	Partnerships:.....	37
3.12	Answering to leads:	37
3.13	“Semeio”	38
3.14	Cross:	39
4.	Challenges:.....	40
4.1	Furniture-related topics:	40
4.2	Phone calls:	40
4.3	Acquiring clientele:.....	41
	Chapter IV – Covet’s mixed business model.....	43
5	United States of America and Portugal	44
5.1	Contextualization: The rise of the American models in Europe.....	44
5.2	The USA Business model	46
5.3	Organizational chart:.....	46
6.	Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory:	48
7.	Covet and Hofstede.....	51
8.	Covet and Google	52
9.	Portuguese business model (Europeanisation).....	52
10.	Trompenaars and the seven dimensions of culture	53
10.1	Relationships	54
10.2	Time	64
10.3	Relationships and time	66
10.4	Environment.....	67
11.	Hofstede VS Trompenaars/Hampden-Turner	68
12.	Covet and the Seven divisions of culture.....	69
	Chapter V – Conclusion	72
	References.....	75

Annex A – Trainee evaluation	89
Annex B – Maison Valentina’s Product Formation Manual.....	92
Appendix A – Internship Diary	96

List of Figures

Figure 1 - Distribution of the number of companies per CAE	7
Figure 2 - Main clients and suppliers of Portugal in 2016	8
Figure 3 – Sales by market of the brand Maison Valentina in 2017	8
Figure 4 - Organizational Chart of the Covet Group.....	14
Figure 5 - Organizational chart of a medium-size Portuguese company	16
Figure 6 - Example of a brand organizational chart	18
Figure 7 – “Sua Excelência”	20
Figure 8 - Working space and Maison Valentina's team	24
Figure 9 - Maison Valentina Bathtubs.....	25
Figure 10 - Assignment of markets according to Brand Ambassador.....	28
Figure 11 - Marketing platforms for seeding	31
Figure 12 - Terms and Conditions	32
Figure 13 – Statistics from Isaloni (Milan) 2019	36
Figure 14 - Statistic Isaloni (Milan) 2019	37
Figure 15 - Example of a reply email to a client	38
Figure 16 - USA Business Hierarchy	47
Figure 17 – Comparison by Country, Portugal & USA	48
Figure 18 - The balance of Universalism and Particularism	55
Figure 19 - Tips for doing business with Individualists and Communitarians.....	57
Figure 20 - Tones of voice of Anglo Saxons, Latin and Oriental cultures.....	59
Figure 21 - Circles of acquaintances of diffuse and specific cultures	60
Figure 22 - The achievement and ascription balance	63
Figure 23 - Circles of Cottle regarding Japan and USA.....	65
Figure 24 - Concepts of time to Sequential and Synchronic cultures	66

Chapter I - Introduction

The present report is conducted in the ambit of the Master in Intercultural Studies of the Instituto de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto. The internship took place in the sales department of “Maison Valentina”, a brand of the Covet Group. It had a duration of four months or 512 hours, beginning on the 4th of February 2019 and concluding on the 7th of June 2019.

The objectives for the realization of the internship were:

- To grow at a personal and professional level;
- To better understand the working-reality of a medium-size company;
- To learn how to deal with an international clientele;
- To further improve my knowledge of the furniture world and business;
- To be in direct contact with a multicultural and diverse environment;
- To learn how to solve professional problems autonomously.

The choice of doing the internship in the company “Covet Group” came after thorough research about the field in which it operated and the opportunities it would provide me. These not only focused on the furniture sector, which does spark some interest, but also on the possibility of working with and alongside people from other cultures and on the chance of being in direct contact with foreign clients.

The core of this report will be divided into three sections – “The Covet Group within the context of the Portuguese furniture sector”, “The Internship” and “Covet’s mixed business model”. The section devoted to the Covet Group, or Chapter II, provides a contextualisation of the company that hosted my internship within the broader industrial sector in which it operates. It will also shed some light on the foundation of the Covet Group, by answering pertinent questions about its organization, methodology of work, business approach and internship program, as well as a description of the brand where my internship took place (Maison Valentina), amongst other aspects.

The third chapter, “The Internship”, describes my overall experience as a trainee in the company and all the things taught to me during that period, as well as all of the difficulties and situations that were faced during my time there. It will also go in-depth into the methods that the company uses to attract clients and how it conducts business with them. There will be a mention of the programs and platforms used to promote and manage possible clients. This chapter will also show how a typical day at Maison Valentina and some of the problems that arose daily from managing issues.

Chapter four, “Covet’s mixed business model”, contains a thorough analysis on Covet’s most interesting feature, the mix of both the Portuguese and the American business systems at once, which not only applies to the commercial part of the company but also to leadership, management, decision-making and even on daily-life aspects. The fourth chapter also shows Covet’s unique managing system - a Portuguese company dreaming of showing predominantly American features. In order to better understand these aspects, two main authors will be mentioned, Hofstede and Trompenars. The cultural models of these authors allow us to understand how different the business models of Portugal and the USA are and where the Covet Group stands within those models.

The methodology used in this report is based primarily on first-hand experience during the time I was a trainee in Maison Valentina, and most of the topics discussed in the second and third chapters are a result of experiences or information I was able to obtain along the way. It is also based on some information that my colleagues were able to provide me with. Secondly, I resorted to specialised literature, namely books, articles and reports, on which to support the theoretical considerations woven along my report.

It is worth pointing out that there were some difficulties in obtaining the necessary information. Apart from the data provided by my colleagues or found during my learning period, acquiring significant information about the company was difficult, there were little to no facts, except for the promotional material about the products the company aims to sell. It was not easy to acquire data and even upon my request for more detailed information, I was never able to obtain it. Concerning the furniture sector, a similar problem arose, not because of lack of information but because it was too abundant and sometimes contradictory, due to the fact that there is not a single entity responsible for this sector but rather four, which in addition do not offer relevant details to the general public. I was, for instance, "unable to find any financial report from Portuguese furniture brands or The Covet Group, so I had to use overall information and reports about the sector, as provided by the DGEA. On the theoretical part of the report, I was able to find relevant information, which could be supported by pertinent authors. Regarding one of the topics dealt with in Chapter 4 (namely Europeanisation), there still is not much available information as it is a fairly new topic of discussion and literature is not abundant, although it was possible to establish the basis for a comparison between American and European business models. Other difficulties worth mentioning had to do with changes in the internship schedule, which required me to delay the search for information that was necessary to write my report.

Therefore, I hope that the following report will allow for a better understanding of the Covet Group as a somewhat atypical example of a medium-sized company within the Portuguese furniture sector, as well as for the sector itself, as it undeniably is a most relevant sector of industrial activity in the country.

Chapter II– The Covet Group within the context of the Portuguese furniture sector

This chapter will be made up of two main topics, a brief description of the Portuguese furniture sector and the position of the Covet Group as a distinct business model within that sector. Therefore, a financial contextualization of the sector will be made, followed by a market comparison with the Covet Group as well as the main trends shown by this sector.

A contextualization of the group will be provided including a comparison with a medium-size Portuguese company. Beginning with its background and history, followed by the company's organizational chart, the different brands and the initiatives of the group will also be dealt with. Towards the end of the chapter, there will be an introduction to the brand where the internship took place, Maison Valentina, which will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter.

2.1 The Portuguese Furniture Market

Since 2017, Portugal's GDP has increased by 2.9%, mainly due to an increase in the volume of exports:

The manufacturing industry, when referring to the GVA (base prices), has registered an increase of 5% in equivalent terms on the first semester of 2017, as opposed to the moderated increase of 0,7% registered in 2016. (DGEAE, 2017: 3).¹

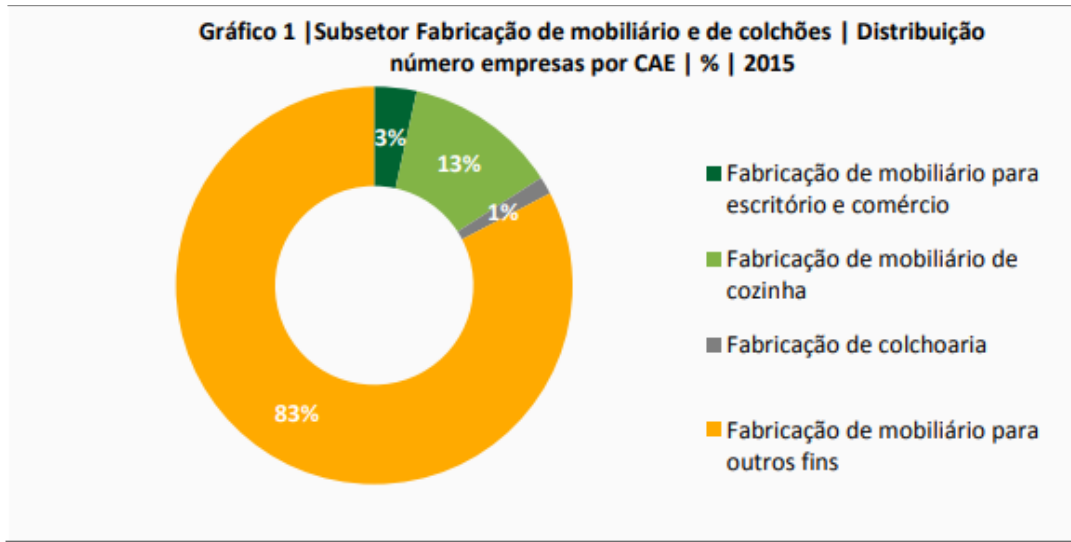
Although the agencies responsible for the preservation of the furniture business and craftsmanship in Portugal are the AEP (Associação Empresarial de Portugal), APIMA (Associação Portuguesa Das Indústrias De Mobiliário e Afins) and AIMMP (Associação das Indústrias de Madeira e Mobiliário de Portugal), the Covet Group was not found to be a part of any of these associations, which promote the development of the national market and domestic production. These associations focus their influence on northern Portugal, where the larger furniture production industries are located, with special attention to Paços de Ferreira (known as the Furniture Capital) and Paredes. The vast majority of these companies are small- to medium-sized companies, mostly family businesses. These SMEs have a small number of workers, therefore the production cannot be done at a mass scale but rather at a smaller one, which allows for a better quantity of handmade pieces.

¹ Our translation.

As we can see in the graph below, in 2017 (the most recent data at the time of writing this report), Portugal had four main sectors related to the manufacturing of furniture and mattresses.

Figure 1 - Distribution of the number of companies per CAE

(in %)



Source: DGEA (2017, p.10)

The first data that jumps out is that furniture for other purposes (“fabricação de mobiliário para outros fins”) accounts for 83% of total production, which means that the majority of the pieces produced in Portugal are for export, as the national market would not be able to absorb such volume. This partly explains the fact, as will be seen below, that the Covet Group mainly works with foreign markets.

In the second place, 13% of the production is accounted for by the manufacturing of kitchen furniture (“fabricação de mobiliário de cozinha”). Once again, the large majority of the pieces manufactured are destined for foreign markets. The manufacturing of office and trade furniture (“fabricação de mobiliário para escritório e comércio”) represent 3%, and lastly, mattress manufacturing (“fabricação de colchoaria”) represent 1%. These numbers show that the manufacture of household furniture largely outweighs all the other types of production combined, which is well below 20% of the total.

Figure 2 - Main clients and suppliers of Portugal in 2016

(in %)

Principais Clientes Bens 2016 (jan-dez)			Principais Fornecedores Bens 2016 (jan-dez)		
	Posição	% Total Exportações		Posição	% Total Importações
FR: França	1.ª	20,17%	ES: Espanha	1.ª	50,87%
ES: Espanha	2.ª	19,49%	IT: Itália	2.ª	8,57%
US: Estados Unidos	3.ª	7,94%	DE: Alemanha	3.ª	7,79%
GB: Reino Unido	4.ª	1,81%	CN: China	4.ª	7,71%
DE: Alemanha	5.ª	1,80%	FR: França	5.ª	7,41%

Source: DGEA (2017, p.13)

As for the main export markets, France was the first destination of Portuguese furniture, with 20,17%, followed by Spain with 19,49%, USA with 7.94%, the UK with 1,81% and lastly, Germany with 1.80%. What this chart shows is the absence of some of the markets most relevant for the Covet Group, namely Russia, China and the Middle East, as shown by the following chart.

Figure 3 – Sales by market of the brand Maison Valentina in 2017

(in €)



Source: Internship Supervisor (internal management document)

Portuguese furniture has a strong reputation in the market, the countries that buy the Portuguese national production know that the pieces they are going to acquire are made with the best materials and will be up to their expectations. “Portuguese design is in good health and recommendable. The talent of our creators and the quality of their work no longer goes unnoticed inside and outside the country.”² (DN, 2013)

² Our translation

The furniture sector has registered a relatively positive evolution, at a production level, benefiting with the introduction of new equipment and new raw materials, especially in the last 10 years. These changes, alongside with the use of more advanced business techniques, have allowed for a better response towards the needs of a consumer with a different profile from the traditional one, which values the comfort and functionality of the products more, alongside with a new concept of valorization of the materials used and the respect for the environment.

(RECET, 2012:7)³

France, Spain and the UK have always had a close trade relationship with Portugal, so it is only expected that they will remain the main export destinations. Upon comparing the Portuguese export target with the ones from Covet, we can see the differences. Whereas the Portuguese targets are mainly traditional business partners and countries that are certain to buy our product, Covet's targets are much wider, searching for customers outside Europe and trying to expand the reach of its trade network.

As already pointed out, the Russian Federation and the USA are the main targets for Covet and while Portuguese companies play it safe by selling to markets they know, Covet gets the advantage by going beyond those European markets that few companies are able to reach.

These differences may in part be justified by the different models of management the companies have. It was mentioned to me on several occasions that Covet prefers not to work with the national market, not only due to its small size and limited capacity to buy in satisfactory numbers, but also to the fact that the domestic market is already mature and overflowed with furniture companies.

As far as suppliers are concerned (figure 2), the highest number of furniture imports are from Spain, with 50.87% of the total. Although Italy, Germany, China and France are lagging far behind Spain, they account for approximately 30% of total furniture imports, which is a significant number. These numbers show the type of strong competition that Portuguese manufacturers have to face in terms of quality and price.

The rise of new furniture exporting countries, that introduce relatively cheaper costs than the countries who usually dominated the sector, makes it crucial for these last ones to use the potentialities of the rise of the world trade, by implementing innovative strategies, fundamentally at a level of production organization, design and distribution. (*Idem*, p: 7)⁴

³ Our translation.

⁴ Our translation.

Figure 4 - The Industry of furniture-report of the business fabric from 2011-2016

			2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
Volume de Negócios								
3101	Fabricação de mobiliário para escritório e comércio	Mil EUR	218 394 ↓	176 760 ↑	182 651 ↑	195 240 ↑	209 802	7%
3102	Fabricação de mobiliário de cozinha	Mil EUR	134 879 ↓	118 231 ↓	113 623 ↑	119 353 ↑	130 471	9%
3103	Fabricação de colchoaria	Mil EUR	100 281 ↑	103 463 ↑	117 578 ↑	124 061 ↑	142 367	15%
3109	Fabricação de mobiliário para outros fins	Mil EUR	925 760 ↓	878 548 ↑	928 908 ↑	1 024 047 ↑	1 103 012	8%
Σ CAE	Total Subsetor Fabricação de mobiliário e de colchões	Mil EUR	1 379 315 ↓	1 277 002 ↑	1 342 759 ↑	1 462 701 ↑	1 585 653	8%
	% Total Ind. Trans.		1,72	1,62	1,69	1,82	1,93	
	% Total Portugal		0,40	0,40	0,42	0,45	0,48	

			2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	
Volume de Negócios								
	Total Subsetor Mobiliário	Milhares €	1 173 539 ↑	1 225 181 ↑	1 338 640 ↑	1 443 286 ↑	1 517 576	5%
	Total Subsetor Colchões	Milhares €	103 463 ↑	117 578 ↑	124 061 ↑	142 367 ↑	165 919	17%
	Total Subsetor Iluminação	Milhares €	122 877 ↓	0 →	0 ↑	142 352 ↑	145 720	2%
	Total Indústria do Mobiliário	Milhares €	1 399 879 ↓	1 342 759 ↑	1 462 701 ↑	1 728 004 ↑	1 829 216	6%
	% Total Ind. Trans.		1,78	1,69	1,82	2,11	2,23	
	% Total Portugal		0,44	0,42	0,45	0,52	0,54	

Source: DGEA (2018)

As shown by figure 4, the furniture business in Portugal has strengthened its position since 2012, following the years of the financial crisis, showing the resilience of an industrial sector that has traditionally played an important role in the business fabric of northern Portugal.

2.2 Significance of Furniture Manufacturing in the Portuguese Industry

The concept of furniture is hard to conceptualize but what it is possible to understand is the different styles and the indisputable presence and importance of Portuguese furniture in the world.

The history of furniture in Portugal dates back to many centuries ago. First, a mere necessity (people needed basic household furnishings, such as tables, chairs and beds), with the empowering of the nobles and clergymen in court, the furniture went from being a necessity to a social pattern that showed that person's wealth. Although it withdrew many inspirations from other countries, Portuguese furniture built its own character "...for the decorative strength, originality and monumental character, the carving and tile" (Ferrão, 1990: 3).⁵

⁵ Our translation.

Among the many materials available, wood was the most abundant, especially after the discovery of Brazil, India and African territories – more exotic woods would come to the mainland, and inspired artisans to create sumptuous pieces with intricate details and decorations.

It is still possible to see this inspiration in some richly adorned Covet pieces, wood usually being the main material, with intricate designs that pay homage to the true Portuguese style.

Figure 5 – “Heritage Sideboard”



Source: Bocadolobo.com

The heritage sideboard is perhaps the one piece that gathers inspiration from and personifies Portuguese furniture. Made of hand-painted tiles, brass, bronze, glass, lacquered wood and gold leaf, it has some of the most iconic elements of the traditional Portuguese style, though it adds a modern feel.

In addition, its design tries to display some important cultural images of Portugal – we can see some allusions to the Portuguese flag and to historic landmarks like Marquês de Pombal, the Portuguese ships used during the discovery times (Naus), mythological figures and even some traditional vegetal patterns on the tiles. This piece is a homage to the old glory of Portugal during the age of the discoveries.

Once wood had become a staple material in the Portuguese furniture business, “[...] iron had its turn, as well as nonferrous materials, such as bronze, copper, brass and even noble metals like gold and silver.” (Ferrão, 1990: 5).⁶

Figure 6 - Products manufactured in the furniture industry

(by type of product)

Fabricação de mobiliário para escritório e comércio	x	x	234 913 079 €
Fabricação de mobiliário de cozinha	x	x	167 128 976 €
Fabricação de colchoaria	x	x	185 714 436 €
Fabricação de mobiliário para Outros Fins	x	x	710 057 442 €

Source: INE (2019)

Nowadays furniture production in Portugal is still important, not only for its monetary value, as we can see the furniture business still generates a significant source of revenue, but also for its cultural value, as it is part of the Portuguese identity and character and is perhaps one of the most important material cultures that the country has.

Some larger companies have modernized their production but remain working alongside artisans to allow the best quality of the pieces to the clients interested in acquiring them.

It is interesting that the Covet Group, although aiming to sell outside the national market always tries to keep the Portuguese imprint to all the pieces they create, adapting themselves to the demand of the time but remaining true to the identity of its artisans.

2.3 Creation and evolution of the Covet Group

The Covet Group was born from a sense of underrepresentation. Two Portuguese design students, upon going to one of the most important design and furniture fairs in the world, ISaloni (Milan), were surprised to find out just how little representation Portuguese furniture had, even though its quality and design excelled.

⁶ Our translation.

Amândio Pereira and Ricardo Magalhães saw in this an opportunity to give Portuguese design a voice in the world and many years later they have succeeded in fulfilling that objective.

In 2003 they founded “Menina Design”, a company that would become a strong competitor in the national market, in the beginning, they had few employees, Ricardo did the designs and Amândio managed the company. The founding stone of the company was set in Gondomar, where it can still be found.

In 2005 the first official brand (Boca do Lobo) was launched, offering innovative and luxurious designs, which quickly turned it into a strong competitor in the international and national market.

The brand specializes in unique furniture, that aims to provide “an exclusive emotional experience, a sense of belonging and a state of mind”, it takes pride in having four core values (passion, innovation, excellence and design) and a serious mission towards Portuguese design: “BOCA DO LOBO mission is understand and interpret the past through technology and contemporary design.” (BocadoLobo. (2019, February 14). Our Story. [Webpage]. Retrieved from bocadolobo.com)

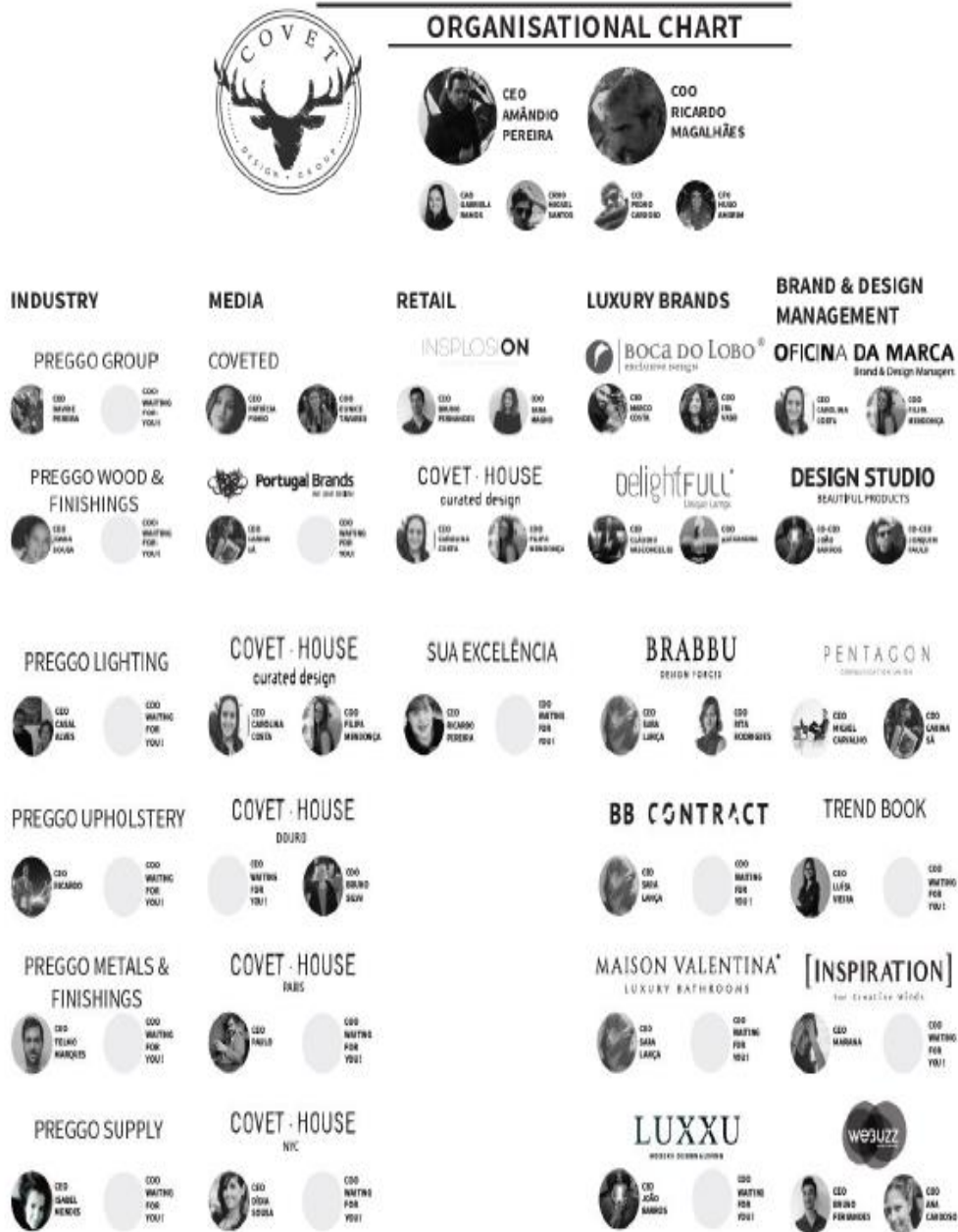
2.4 From Menina Design to Covet Group

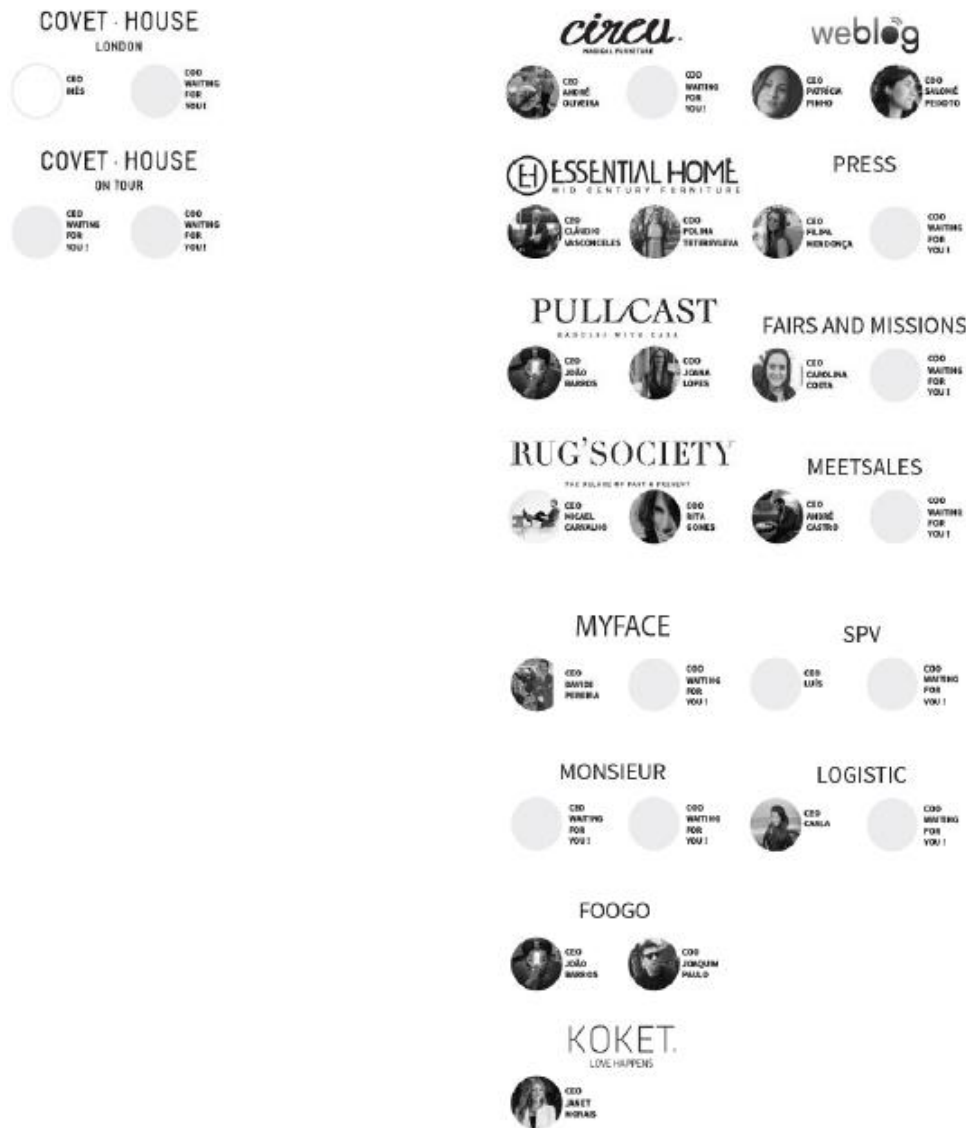
Throughout the years, there was a need for a change in the name, the ever-growing profit of the company and the creation of new brands made the name “Menina Design” seem obsolete. There was a need for the rebranding of the company so in 2017 “The Covet Group” was born.

It comprises eleven brands, two main offices, six manufacturing units and four international showrooms, there are 450 employees and over 1500 products. The motto of the group is “Our mission is Elevate Design and Craftsmanship” and the deer was the chosen symbol for the group, as it represents “strength, wisdom and guidance through the art of journeying.” (CovetGroup. (2019, February 14). Mission. [Webpage]. Retrieved from covetgroup.com)

2.4.1 Organizational chart

Figure 4 - Organizational Chart of the Covet Group





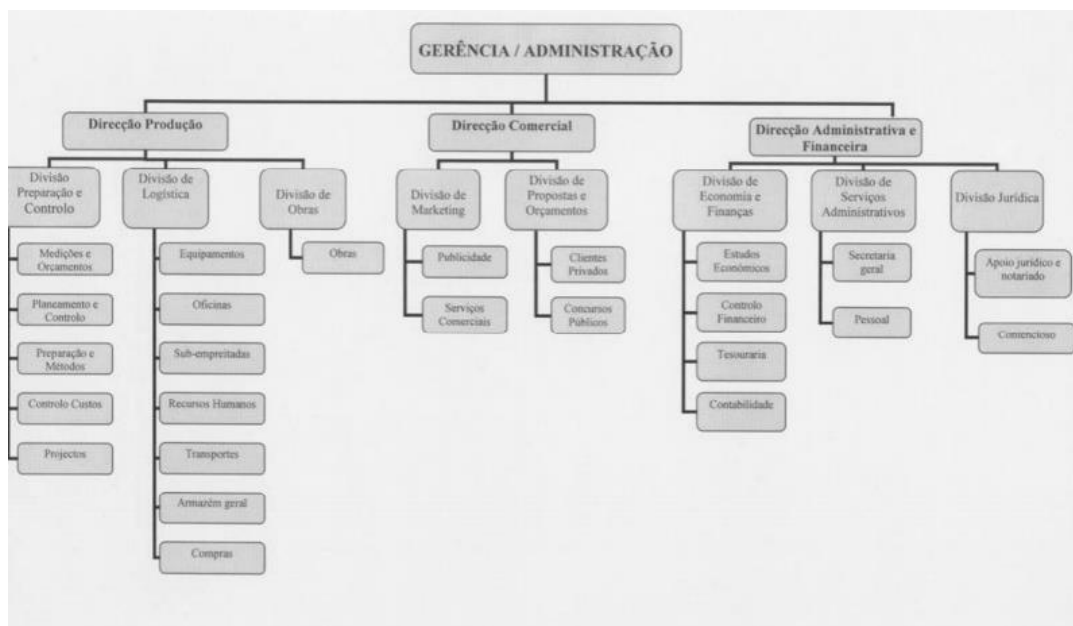
Source: Manual de Acolhimento, Covet Group

The organisational chart allows us to better understand how the company is organized – the company has one CEO and one COO and within each brand, there is also a CEO and a COO, who are in charge of the Sales Manager, who alongside the marketing manager and the press manager, report to the CEO.

The Sales Manager is responsible for everything that happens inside the brand, (s)he works alongside the other managers and together they run the brand. Usually, the marketing and press managers do not have a COO but there could be more than one in the sales department.

The teams respond to the Brand CEO and (s)he responds directly to the company’s CEO. This model is more direct in the sense that there is no vertical hierarchy, the person responsible for each brand is always in contact with the owner of the company, which not only facilitates the decision-making process but also establishes a stronger professional relationship between them.

Figure 5 - Organizational chart of a medium-size Portuguese company



Source: Web.fe.up.pt (2008, p. 17)

Upon comparing it to the typical medium-size Portuguese company, we can see just how different the organizational chart is. Unlike Covet, decision-power is concentrated in one person instead of being distributed into sub-chiefs and the company may be run by a single individual or by a board of people who help manage it.

Directly below, we can see the “Direção Produção”, the “Direção Comercial” and the “Direção Administrativa e Financeira”, the first is in charge of three divisions, “Preparação e Controlo”, “Logística” and “Obras”. These three answer to the director of production and this director is in charge of running the above-mentioned three departments.

The “Preparação e control” is in charge of everything related to the project, the measurements, the preparation of the team, amongst others, so they are the physical part of the company.

The “Logística” is responsible for the acquisition and storage of materials, in order to process them into the necessary pieces to build the project. It is also where the Human resources are located, these are in charge of hiring people to put together a team to work on the project.

Lastly, “Obras” is the department that builds the projects themselves, they are the ones on the field and the director is in charge to make sure everything goes accordingly to the client’s demands.

The “Direção Comercial” is subdivided into two categories, the Marketing department and the “Proposta e Orçamentos”. These, unlike the “Direção Produção”, are desk jobs instead of field jobs.

The marketing department is responsible for the promotion of the company to the general public, through advertisement, adds, flyers, social media, amongst others. They are the first form of contact a potential buyer has, so it is essential that the department works as a team to acquire clients.

The “Proposta e Orçamentos” is the where the financial part of the projects takes place, they are in charge of creating budgets for the client and propose counter-offers or give suggestions in order to improve the client’s project.

Lastly, there is the “Direção Administrativa e Financeira”, which is subdivided into three categories, “Economia e Finanças”, “Serviços Administrativos” and “Divisão Jurídica”. The first department is related to all the financial part of the company, it is in charge of dealing with payments to the state, salaries of the employees, the profit or losses of the company and overall maintenance of good financial health for the company.

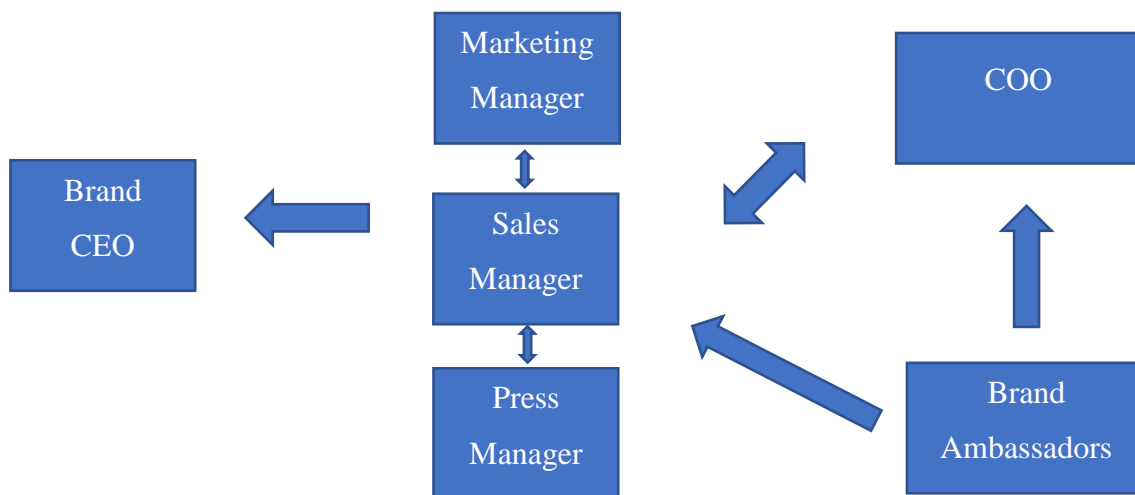
The “Serviços Administrativos” are in charge of all the expenses of the company, dealing with suppliers, the issuance of the necessary paperwork for a certain project to take off, amongst other things.

The “Divisão Jurídica” is responsible for the legal part of the company, they are the ones who articulate themselves with the government, city-hall and even with the local power. This department is made up of lawyers and other law-related professionals.

This model does not allow for a close professional relationship - for example, the head of the logistics department would never report directly to the director of the company, it must first follow the power hierarchy. Choosing to ignore the person above is seen as a disrespectful attitude, while in Covet’s case it would be considered normal.

To further illustrate this power division, we can look at the graph below, illustrating the brand management model within the Covet Group. Here, the Brand CEO is the authority figure of the brand, followed by the Sales Manager, who is assisted by the Marketing Manager and the Press Manager. It is worth pointing out that there is a relaxed attitude related to this division. During my time there I did not feel that the people represented by this graph had a strictly professional relationship among them, it was more of a casual and friendly atmosphere, in which a simple trainee would feel comfortable enough to approach the Brand CEO without following the rigorous social behaviour of the Portuguese business model.

Figure 6 - Example of a brand organizational chart



Source: self-elaboration

As will be seen in the following chapters, Covet tries to distance itself from the typical small-to medium-size company organization; they follow what may be considered a mix of the Portuguese and the American style. Power is still focused on one person, but like in the American model, there are sub-divisions – this American inspiration somehow revolves more around the idea of a small division of the work and in some sense a certain independence, i.e., the CEO assigns the work and the COO and Brand CEO are responsible for doing it. There are more managers than is usually found in Portuguese businesses and the employee is easily replaced, if one element decides to leave another can integrate the team immediately because the other members know what the global objective is.

This mix of two models also allows for a better career progression. Whereas in the Portuguese model the high position is held by the same person for many years, in the case of Covet, people can reach a higher position rather easily.

2.4.2 Corporate Organization

The brands of the group are divided by categories according to the type of furniture they sell. Boca do Lobo, Brabbu, Essential Home and Koket, all sell the same pieces: upholstery, case goods and decorative pieces, but each brand has its own personal style.

Delightfull and Luxxu specialize in lighting fixtures, however, the segments they aim to sell to are completely different. Rug's society, Pull cast and Fogoo are recent brands created to fulfil the lack of certain decorative items, such as rugs, fireplaces and knobs, among others.

Circu is a brand that specializes in furniture for children and teens, they have fresher and more colourful designs that are meant to appeal to the little ones; and lastly, we have Maison Valentina, the bathroom furniture brand.

The brands are usually divided into the marketing and the sales team, which may or not share the same space. Initially, the brand in which my internship took place was located in a single space, which boosted productivity and increased the bonding of the team; however, after some time the company decided that employees should change location so as to not become attached to the people they work alongside with.

Figure 7 – “Sua Excelência”



Source: Own photo

The group has two main offices, the OM (Oficina da Marca) and the seminar office, not fully operational yet. Due to recent changes in the organization of the company, the services are temporarily located in the OM, which has some of the smaller brands, the WeBuzz department (which is in charge of all IT-related topics) and an eating facility called “Sua Excelência”.

2.4.3 Covet Town

The main objective of Covet Town is to gather all the employees, services and warehouses in a single place: “the design city”, as it is usually referred to. However, due to monetary constraints, the two locations at present contain the different brands, and the brand where the internship took place was still located at OM.

Four production units support the furniture company; although 15% of the production comes from partnerships with local businesses, 85% is ensured by the company’s own production units, known as Pregoo. These units are divided into metal, wood, upholstery and lighting, and their locations are scattered around the council Gondomar.

The Covet town is perhaps the most challenging project the group has planned so far, with an investment of 50 Million € and an area of 80,000 sq.m. They intend to join all services

and brands in a single place, which is already under construction, some brands and services are already operating there. The megalomaniac project is expected to be concluded in 2020, when people, services, distributors and manufacturers will all be together in this space.

The company itself will also have a series of social and relaxation places, the transfer plan is divided into three stages: the first includes the transfer of all marketing, human resources and management services, followed by industrial units and lastly the construction of a museum, residential area, library, supermarket, and leisure spaces.

Alongside all of these locations, the brand also has four showrooms (Douro, London, Paris, and NYC) and a portable one, “The Lounge” that was part of a furniture fair in Italy (ISaloni). The plan for the next years is the opening of three more showrooms, in Vietnam, Dubai and Mexico.

The company currently has 450 employees with an upward trend as the group evolves - by 2020 the group is expected to have an increase of 200 more workers.

2.4.4 Trainee Program

The company bases its success in the interns it has throughout the year: while they have an opportunity of learning what it is like to work in a company and in real-life scenarios, the company profits from the free labour⁷. Covet’s internship program is so important and well-structured that in addition to national students they also “import” foreign students who are then expected to stay. During this time, there is a 4-week learning schedule with challenges every day and, after that trial period, one is expected to work as a normal employee. The trainee is given an email account, access to all the working tools and is even expected to go to meetings and participate in workshops. This is a way for the trainee to feel completely integrated into the company, but it also gives the sales leader an opportunity to evaluate them and see if they have what it takes to receive a job proposal.

This sort of program withdraws inspiration from the trainees' programs in America, where there is a hands-on approach “[...] come to the United States to gain exposure to US culture and to receive hands-on experience in American business practices [...]” (International centre for language studies. (2019, October 09). Mission. [Webpage]. <https://www.icls.edu/exchange-trainee-programs/win-in-the-usa-program-2/>) as opposed to

⁷ Both interns and workers are expected to work on their own computers, thus reducing even more the costs for the company.

the Portuguese system. In Portugal, usually the trainee is assigned to a staff member and is expected to follow him/her in their daily tasks and assist them on anything the person needs.

The Portuguese case is more prone to exploitation cases as opposed to the American system. When comparing both there are quite a lot of differences, the American focuses on trainees learning mostly by themselves with low interaction with the supervisor, they should be able to solve problems on their own and not be dependent on somebody else. There is a structured plan to follow with morning and afternoon activities, the trainee is given access to all the tools a company worker would have and is expected to work as one of them.

Unlike the open-minded American model, the Portuguese system is much more restricted and conservative, as a trainee I would have never been given access to so many platforms and accounts. However, there are already some companies fighting against this stereotypical behaviours, such as , Farfetch:

“Great work environment, the company respects the workers, and I never had to take a day off to go to the doctor or the bank”[...] "fast paced but with a significant focus on work-life balance" (Glassdoor (2019, December 04). Farfetch [Webpage]. Retrieved from <https://www.glassdoor.com/Reviews/Farfetch-Reviews-E799159.htm>)

The internship program, if the company actually has one, would not focus on solo learning and it would be more closely supervised, often with some sort of co-dependency on somebody else.

2.4.5 Covet Foundation and other initiatives

The Covet Foundation aims to be:

A tribute to all makers for their wisdom, storytelling, and for building a history with beautiful creations through ancient techniques and raw materials. We stand up for the ones that keep the art of craftsmanship alive. A desire to reveal the process as a peer of the finished product itself.” (CovetGroup. (2019, February 16). Mission and Vision 2017 [Webpage]. Retrieved from <https://www.covetfoundation.com/foundation/mission>)

This foundation is responsible for awarding artisans and also for organizing various events such as informative lectures and workshops.

2.4.6 Fairs and Missions

Furniture fairs have been around for many years and the group invests a lot of its time and money in being represented in them, it is a way of promoting the company while acquiring new clients. The *booths*, as the company calls the stands, have become increasingly larger over the years and this year in Isaloni 2019 the booth had all the brands represented in one place.

Currently, they attend Maison & Object (Paris), ISaloni (Milan), Imm (Cologne) and smaller fairs are attended by the brand they find better suited to represent the group. Maison Valentina attended those two fairs and it is also present in bathroom specific tradeshows such as Cersaie (Bologne), Ideobain (Paris), EuroBagno (Italy) and ISH (Frankfurt). The aim of the missions is to strengthen the bond with profitable clients and meet with new potential ones.

The missions are carefully planned out with market prospects being carried out prior to them, the country is chosen by the number of opportunities, and several brands can join in the mission, either with a representative or by asking a fellow colleague to schedule a meeting with their clients.

The budget for the missions can vary according to the country, the costs include accommodation, flights, food expenses, travelling, transfers and brand promo material (flyers, samples, cards...), brands with smaller budgets cannot always join in but can be represented by someone else.

The time when the mission will take place is dictated according to the country or by events, per example, a tradeshow, a specific event or the opening of a showroom...

A way to diminish cost comes from advertising, in exchange for free accommodation or meals, the establishment will get free advertisement with the writing of an article in the group magazine "Coveted" which is then sent to all the clients. Visibility in exchange for free commodities.

Overall, missions are successful, clients value a face over a picture and building proper relationships strengthens the commercial bond. The samples and brochures taken allow the client to feel what their finish piece will be like and have a general idea of sizes, dimension, finishes...

This is also a good opportunity to ask any possible questions the client might have as the brand ambassador will be the correct person to answer them. Missions can vary from year to year and even from client to client.

2.5 Maison Valentina

My internship took place in Maison Valentina, a bathroom-oriented brand responsible for selling a wide range of bathroom furniture. The brand was created in 2014 due to a lack of pieces related to this part of the house, it felt as though it was being neglected so the group came up with the concept.

It initially began with the name “Royal Bubbles”, but it was quickly changed into its current one as it transmitted more class and elegance. Its main objective is to offer “[...] high-quality solutions made with the best selection of materials, combined with rare manual work techniques, contemporary design and ensuring supreme quality.” (Maison Valentina (2019, February 20). About Us [Webpage]. Retrieved from https://www.maisonvalentina.net/en/about#about_goals)

Figure 8 - Working space and Maison Valentina's team



Source: Own photo

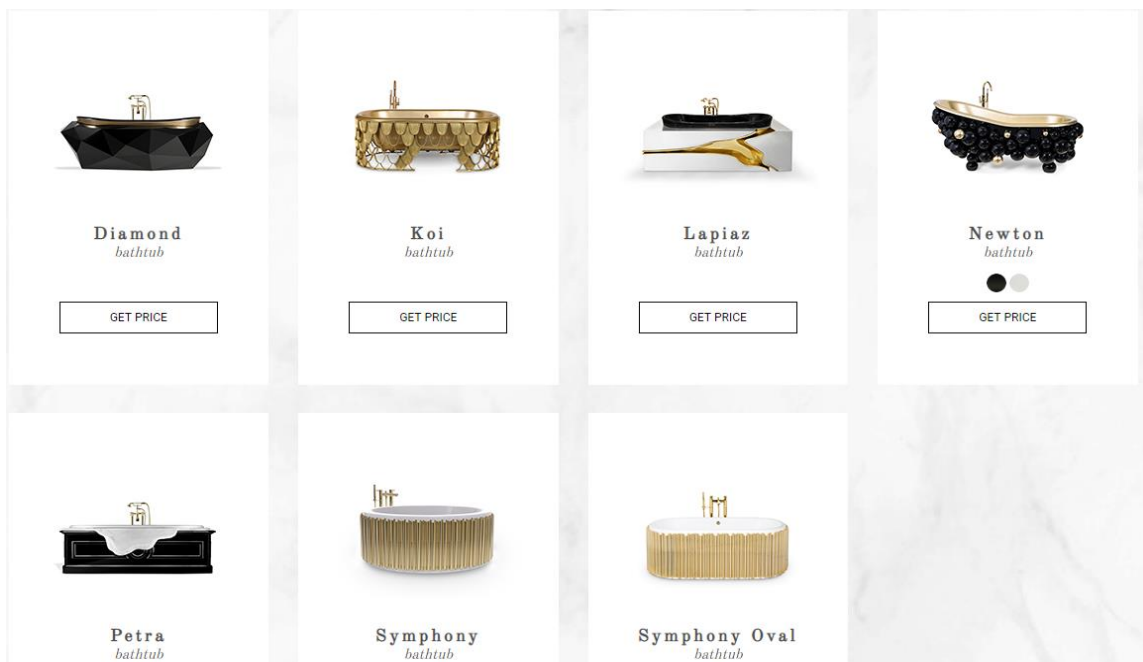
The brand is proud to follow some guidelines that ensure its quality:

- Luxury;
- Exclusivity;
- Hand-made;
- Harmony;
- Customizable.

These are the core values of Maison Valentina alongside its motto “if there's one room that deserves a little extra luxury, it's the bathroom.” (Maison Valentina, Manual de Formação, p.1)

Perhaps the clearest evidence of the brand’s values are its pieces, ranging from bathtubs, washbasins, freestanding, bathroom accessories, case goods, upholstery, lighting and wall panelling. The brand specializes in unique and breath-taking pieces, with Asian, French and Italian inspiration, gold and black being the main colours of the collections. The pieces are separated into collections and categories, some collections already have the complete family (bathtub, mirror, washbasin, freestanding, side table...), while others are still in progress but as the main collections there are: Koi, Symphony, Petra, Newton, Diamond, Tortoise and Crochet, with more items and collections coming soon.

Figure 9 - Maison Valentina Bathtubs



Source: MaisonValentina.com

Maison Valentina specializes in bathroom pieces, but it also sells furniture from its sister brands aiming to complement any bathroom, and it has now expanded to a more hospitality-oriented line of work as well.

The ATO collection or assemble to order is a more affordable line of Maison Valentina, allowing for larger orders of vessel sinks, taps, surfaces and hardware by hospitality clients (hotels, resorts, restaurants..) and large establishments. Prices are lower, and ATO allows for attractive discounts on large quantity orders. Besides the cost, this collection allows a less invasive project, the pieces can be easily installed without any previous modification to the bathroom, which does not happen in the first line collection.

This collection was created due to the difficulty of Maison Valentina to join certain projects, which required several pieces, so it can also be seen as a renovation collection. The line allows for full customization and it may be adapted to fit into any project.

2.5.1 Brand Organization

The brand is organized into a CEO (Sara Lança), Sales Manager (Sérgio Oliveira), Sales Manager COO (Rebecca Ferreira), Marketing Manager (Susana Ramos), Press Manager (Soraia Costa) and Press Relations (Carina Ferreira), Branding COO (Marta Moura) and Brand ambassadors (Flávia Martins, Diogo Miranda, Taras Yatsula...) that are in charge of different markets.

Each person in the team is assigned a different task but the main objective is to generate leads⁸ and attract clients. The team is in constant change as people come and go, and it is interesting to note that within its five years of existence, I was the first trainee the brand ever had, due to logistic reasons.

⁸ Lead: A lead refers to contact with a potential customer, also known as a “prospect”. Depending on the organisation, the definition of the term “lead” may vary. For some companies, a “lead” is a contact already determined to be a prospective customer, whereas other companies consider a “lead” to be any sales contact. But what remains the same across definitions is that a lead will potentially become a future client. Sales teams therefore have a responsibility to convert a maximum amount of leads to maintain a good conversion rate (atinternet.com, 2019).

Chapter III – The Internship

This chapter is divided into two parts, the internship itself and its challenges. The first part provides a description of the internship, including all the daily tasks, new information, the platforms and software used by the company and some marketing terms used in the corporate world. The second part discusses some of the difficulties felt during the time of the internship and whether or not I managed to solve them.

3.1 Work

The work developed inside the brand may be separated into four categories, the sales, the marketing, the press and the post-sales.

The sales team is responsible for replying to customers, ensuring sales, establishing partnerships and overall managing the whole selling process. It is taken care of by brand ambassadors, which are responsible for different geographical areas – there is usually a brand ambassador for each continent, but it can also be divided by country and even region. Below an example of the division during my internship may be observed.

Figure 10 - Assignment of markets according to Brand Ambassador

Name	Market
Sérgio	Middle East
Rebecca	Europe China
Flávia	United States Canada North Africa Australia
Taras	Russia Ukraine Belarus Kazakhstan Uzbekistan Armenia Azerbaijan Turkmenistan Kyrgyzstan
Teresa	Latin America UK Turkey
Alexandre	India Pakistan Malaysia Vietnam Singapore Nepal Hong Kong Central and South Africa Bangladesh Thailand Indonesia

Source: Self-elaboration

The process begins with a lead, who can come from the brand website, platforms, direct chat, social media or even press. The sales team only takes care of the first three. Once the lead appears on the program, which is called Salesforce, it is assigned to the brand ambassadors responsible for that market, and there is a time limit for replying to leads.

The first thing to do is the profiling of the client (collecting as much information about them as possible) so that the brand ambassador can know if the client has commercial potential or not and also verify if they are professionals in the field. The second step is replying to the client with their request, such as 3D files, quotations (price), catalogues, product sheets or even just extra information. The last step takes us back to the first: if the client has commercial potential, a series of follow-ups will be carried out, or it will simply be considered an unqualified client.

The marketing is meant to take care of social networks, such as Pinterest, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn... They are responsible for advertising and publicising the brand online, in order to attract potential clients. Some ways of doing it include updating the brand blog, sending out newsletters with new items or events, informing clients of interesting promotions. They are also in charge of replying to leads that request Ebooks or even marketing-related questions.

The press team takes care of all press-related aspects: featured photos in magazines, publishing articles in the press, interacting with journalists, seeking partnerships with magazines and press platforms, in order to disseminate and give visibility to the brand.

The sales team can also acquire clients by doing “Semeio”, which may translate as searching for clients and sending them an email introducing the brand and trying to captivate them. This can be done by giving out, for example, a brand catalogue and asking questions or suggesting other things to be offered.

The post-sales department takes care of all complaints regarding the pieces and the customer services, they are responsible for handling any clients’ complaints, they work in conjoined effort with the logistic department.

3.2 Time-frame of the internship

My internship took place from the 4th of February 2019 to the 7th of June, adding up to a total of 512 hours.

The internship was done in the “Oficina da Marca” under the guidance of the supervisor Sérgio Oliveira and his team. The first day of internship began as 10:30 AM with a brief explanation and get-together of all of the trainees that were meant to start that day, a total of six distributed among different brands. The HR responsible (Catarina Ferrão) explained the functioning of the company, answered our questions and concerns before we were introduced to our supervisors. My supervisor began by introducing me to the employees of the brand and gave me a general tour of the building.

According to the memo given by the Internship Supervisor, the internship was divided by weeks:

- Week 1: Introduction to the group, brand organization, brand ambassador tasks, CRM Salesforce and study of a product.
- Week 2: Web marketing formation, Press formation, Weblog formation ATO formation and market study.
- Week 3: Internal processes, use of the networks, cross⁹, cross-selling and up-selling concepts.
- Week 4: Introduction to top markets, positions, profiling of clients, answers, leads and cross leads.
- Week 5: Profiling of clients, responding to leads, cross lead, cross opportunity; follow up in CC of a sales process.
- Week 6-16: Seeding on the defined markets, clients profiling, reply to leads, cross leads, cross on opportunities, clients follow up.
- Week 17: Report and Status of clients.

3.3 Training:

In order to get to know the brand Maison Valentina and its way of working, there was a need for a theoretical introduction of its products, values and benefits.

⁹ Cross “is a marketing program that targets buyers of a product with an offer to purchase a related product [...] A cross-promotion is happening any time a customer is offered a product or service because he purchased a different product or service. It can take many forms, including joint marketing arrangements, shared production of events or newsletters, referral arrangements, discounted product offers, or suggestions during the buying process. (Study.com, 12-09-2019)

For the duration of three weeks, I had to follow a training plan, which consisted of learning activities, theoretical and practical exercises and small lectures with the different members of the team.

3.4 Introduction to the Marketing team

On the second week, I was introduced to the marketing team and they gave me training on the level of web marketing, press and weblog. They showed me how they operate, what they do on the website, the different social platforms where they gather clients...

Below is a graph that helps to further understand the range of the social media platforms and which one is easier to use in order to acquire new clients or even just followers.

Figure 11 - Marketing platforms for seeding



Source: Marketing Colleague of Maison Valentina

3.5 Introduction to the brands

The introduction to the brands was done by exploring the different websites the company has for each brand. Without any previous knowledge of the brands, I was asked to give brief summaries of each one, their inspiration, style and favourite pieces. The brands were: Maison Valentina, Boca do Lobo, Brabbu, Delightfull, Essential Home, Luxxu, Circu, Koket, Rug's society, Pullcast, Foogo and Prego.

I was also asked to point out any negative aspects of Maison Valentina's website, in order for them to be improved. Perhaps the most remarkable feature is the complete focus on the image of the website when in it we can see it is well made, opulent, and luxurious, however, the details are where the company loses. Translation issues are the most common ones, they are scattered throughout the many brand's websites and it is easy to see that there was not an investment in a proper translation team. We must bear in mind that they were translated by the employees who all know English but it is evident they did a literal translation. From an employee's point of view, the situation was not bad, the message still got across and both the workers and the clients were able to understand, but for the overall experience the company wants to transmit to the client, language errors can really damage its image.

Figure 12 - Terms and Conditions

TAXES

1. All taxes and excises of any nature whatsoever now or hereafter levied by governmental authority, whether federal, state or local, either directly or indirectly, upon the sale or transportation of any goods covered, hereby, shall be paid and borne by Buyer

Source: MaisonValentina.com (2019)

From what I have gathered, these mistakes have been pointed out on several occasions but have not yet been corrected.

3.6 Introduction to selling terminology

As part of the training process, there was a sales concepts introduction. I had to learn what were Leads, Stakeholders, Opportunities, Pro-forms, Targets, amongst other terms...

I also had the same explanation within the platforms the brand used (SalesForce and MOM), I learned about the processing of a lead and how to reply to an email and I also began practising fake phone calls, in which my colleague would pretend to be clients with technical

questions and I had to try and answer them as correctly as possible. Trainees were also encouraged to find out the lead's personal interests in order to use them to create trust and thus consolidate the commercial relationship.

What was missing in the training was how to approach clients with different cultures from our own, not only via email but also in person. One must take into account that certain cultures do not value aspects that others do, while one culture may like to be flattered others may not. I believe it would have contributed to the overall understanding and acquiring of clients if there was given a proper explanation about the topic.

It is also worth mentioning that the same happened about the style of language to use, some countries prefer a stern, more professional way of speaking, whereas others have a preference for a more relaxed style. I learnt this from experience, for example, the UK-based clients talked very professionally, though Mexicans always preferred a more relaxed way of talking, using emoticons, laughing and using short forms for people's names.

3.7 Introduction to ATO

The ATO collection or assembler to order is a cheaper line of Maison Valentina directed to hospitality clients, it was important to learn about it as it had been recently launched and there was a high expectation about it. As already pointed out, the line focuses on bulk orders by hotels or restaurants – the bigger the order, the better the discount that the client gets.

3.8 Platforms: MOM and ArchiExpo

The platforms are one of the many ways the company attracts clients. The MOM (Maison et objet) platform and ArchiExpo platform are the two used and for the duration of my internship, I was responsible for the first one, which required daily updates in order to keep trending in the main page which would, in turn, generate leads. The MOM platform is one of the most important ones for professionals in the area.

My daily task consisted of updating the pieces of the brand, in order to keep them in the "New Products" tabs, which allowed bigger visibility and assured more clicks on the brand page itself. I was responsible for updating and correcting all the existing pieces and introducing the new ones (inserting them on the platform manually), add new content and overall make the website more appealing and interactive.

From the last week of April, there were new guidelines towards the platforms and, instead of a free updating schedule, we had to attend mandatory updating sessions when all those

responsible for the platforms were present. These sessions were made in partnership with WeBuzz, they gave us suggestions and tips to generate more leads.

Regarding this force updates, they were part of a July deadline of profit the company was meant to reach, so everybody was being pressured to succeed. Although, in theory, updating the platform every day could improve the number of overall leads, this did not happen at the expected rate.

My brand took almost a month of regular updating to generate more leads, but even then they were not significant enough to justify the effort. Having to update always at the same hour and all together also created problems, the platform would crash much more often, each brand product would not be as relevant due to the fact that other brands were also updating theirs and overall the restriction of having to stop working to update a platform that could be done at another time was becoming tiresome. My internship ended before July so I did not receive feedback on the success of the operation, nevertheless, it seemed to have worked better for larger brands than for smaller ones.

3.9 Salesforce:

The company's selling software was called SalesForce. After receiving a professional email and a brief explanation on how to operate it, I was expected to use it as a regular employee.

The first skill I had to master was how to cross-lead clients and send them an appealing email, introducing myself, followed by profiling and replying to leads.

Among the most common leads, we received inquiries about the price, 3D's and availability. The reply to the clients was done when a lead from our assigned countries entered the webmail and Salesforce and it should be answered as fast as possible.

From the moment a lead appeared in Salesforce, it was immediately profiled and from there on the request of the client was separated into many categories, but the most important was its commercial potential and also if it was a "Hot" or "Cold" lead.

A client having commercial potential or not came from the information we found. If the client had a website with pictures of its projects and they were somewhat luxurious, we would consider them clients with commercial potential. The hot or cold status came from the amount of information available or that we were able to find about the client.

Within Salesforce the sales team would only reply to Websites leads, as everything concerning EBooks and Press belonged to the marketing and press team.

3.10 Fairs:

As previously mentioned, the company attends a series of tradeshows. These serve two purposes, to showcase the new products of the brand and to generate profitable leads.

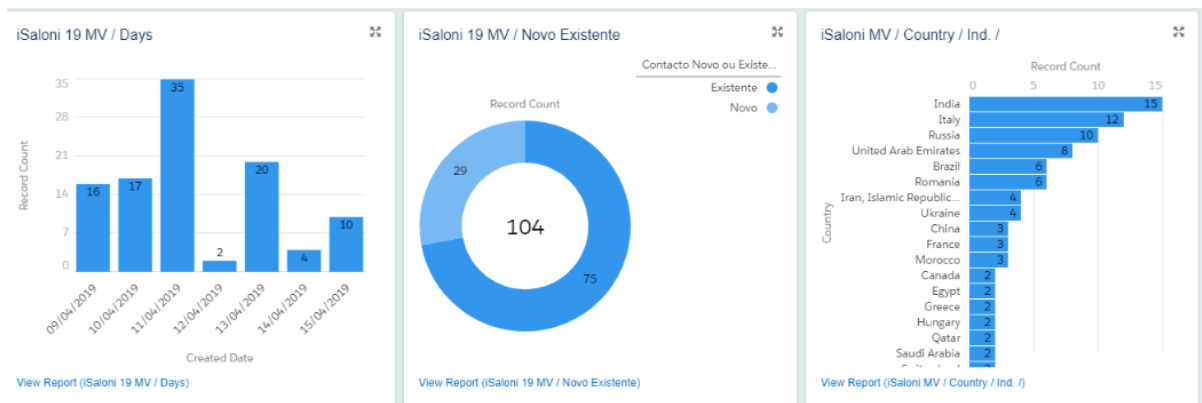
Representatives of the brand are sent to attract potential buyers, they walk them through the pieces, brand, terms and conditions, brochures and even invite them to touch or try the pieces. Depending on the brand, the number of leads or potential clients varies, we must take into account that a bathroom brand will have much more difficulties in attracting clients than a brand that sells chairs or sofas.

The 2019 ISaloni, in Milan, provides an example worth analysing¹⁰. The fair is one of the largest furniture tradeshows in Europe, the Maison Valentina team sent three representatives since this year the brand had a shared stand with the rest of the brands.

The brand created ambiances with some of the brands best sellers and also with the new products, which were meant to captivate potential buyers and showcase the best of the brand.

¹⁰ There was an overall difficulty on getting statistics about the company. The ones that I was able to acquire were via Sales Manager, overall the company is very secretive about their data as it is impossible to find their status on public domains, like many companies have.

Figure 13 – Statistics from ISaloni (Milan) 2019



Source: Internship Supervisor of Maison Valentina

The clients could only enter the stand if they left a card which ensured clients to the brand, not all of them would have commercial potential but it was a way to attract more. Once inside the stand, the brand ambassador would accompany the client and tell them all of the information about the items.

Upon further dialoguing with my colleagues I was able to understand that this particular fair was not profitable nor successful for Maison Valentina, the shared stand had smaller bathroom division and they were overpowered by the larger division of the stand.

Nevertheless, upon analysing the graph we can conclude that:

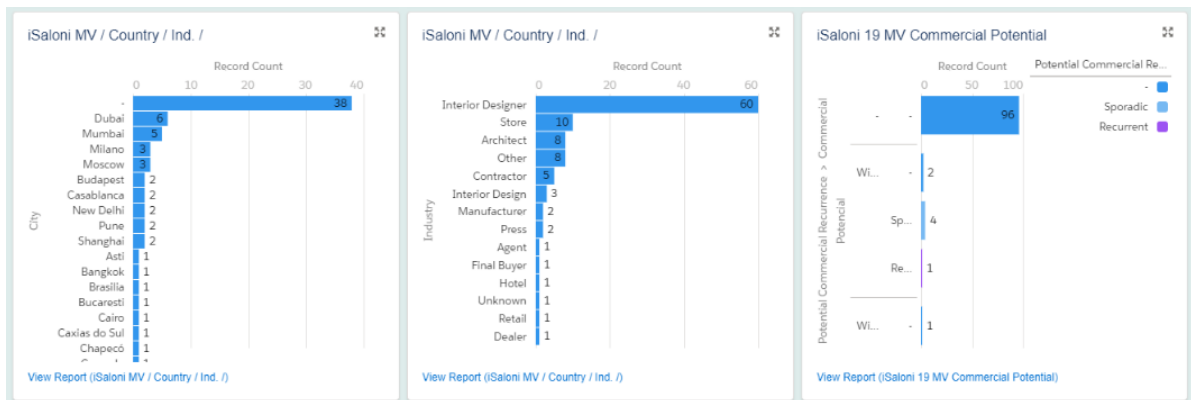
The brand had a total of 104 leads, with the third day being the busiest one, from these 104 the vast majority of the clients were already existing ones; the people who attend ISaloni are experienced interior designers, so it is normal that they were already familiar with the brand.

The largest visiting country was India followed by the host country Italy; it is difficult to establish a tendency of where the clients mostly come from as they come from various parts of the world.

Within the city graph, there is a different tendency, we can see that Dubai was the location with the most clients but India still managed to be on the front with the cities of Mumbai, New Delhi and others.

Lastly, as already mentioned, most visitors to the fair were interior designers.

Figure 14 - Statistic Isaloni (Milan) 2019



Source: Internship Supervisor of Maison Valentina

3.11 Partnerships:

The brand has been establishing partnerships throughout the years, some include Pombo, Made in Youthland, Couto, Castelbel, Carolina Curado.

While Maison Valentina has brands that complement the bathroom and help it look more complete for their fairs, the brands receive free advertisement. The partnerships are only done with Portuguese brands, which promotes national commerce outside Portuguese borders.

3.12 Answering to leads:

A normal day working in Maison Valentina consisted of arriving at 9:00 and immediately performing the first task of the day, which was answering the leads from the clients of our markets. The clients would fill in a form where they would specify what were their request and we, with a standardized email would reply to the request.

Before any reply is sent, profiling is done, in order to acquire as much information as possible about the client, not only to understand if they will be clients with commercial potential but also to be able to confirm that indeed they are who they claim to be. The company offered discounts in their order based on the profession of the client and with this previous knowledge, it was very frequent for many people to pretend to be, for example, interior designers when they were not, in order to get better discounts.

Regarding the profiling, we were told to search deeply into the client's life, being able to sometimes establish a personal relationship or even share common interests was an excellent

way to make the client trust us and to establish lasting business relations. Some of my colleagues already had permanent clients who would only buy if they were the sellers, even when they wanted pieces that were not related to the ones sold by Maison Valentina. These relationships are many times established during the different fairs the brand attends.

After the profiling and everything being inserted into SalesForce, the reply to the client would then be sent. A practical example may be found below:

Figure 15 - Example of a reply email to a client

Subject: Maison Valentina's Catalogue to (NAME)

Dear (NAME),

My name's (NAME) and I'm Maison Valentina's Product Specialist and I would like to thank you for this request.

Maison Valentina offers a diverse range of **high-end bathroom furniture** that is made with the finest material selection and contemporary design.

Please click here to access our PDF Catalogue.

We also have **Inspirations Books** and **free Ebooks** that can inspire you, let me know if you want me to provide you one.

Below you will find all my **contacts (phone, WhatsApp, Skype)**, feel free to contact me if you need further information.

Kind regards,

Source: Internship Supervisor from Maison Valentina

Each Brand Ambassador would be assigned countries where they spoke a language he or she was familiar with. In order to ease communication, I was assigned to Latin America, where to simplify transactions I would reply and answer in Spanish. Sometimes the clients on the other side were not comfortable with English, so it was already a plus to communicate in their mother tongue. The same happened in French, German and Russian countries.

3.13 "Semeio"

Throughout the day, more leads would appear and they followed the same rules. Having leads was not always a guarantee, they came in periods, there would be weeks where a certain market would not have leads and there would be weeks when there would not be enough

time to reply to them all, these waves were related to many factors, such as national holidays, seasons, fairs, political stability of the country...

In order to rectify this problem, we would do “Semeio” or seeding, which was a way for the brand ambassadors to introduce themselves and the brand to their assigned markets, in order to obtain more clients.

Tools such as Instagram, LinkedIn, Houzz and Pinterest were used for that purpose. Once a possible client was found, they would receive an email introducing the brand ambassador for that country, the group and brand. The levels of success of this style of introductions were not excellent: from personal experience when sending them, we are looking at a response rate of 2 answers for every 350 emails sent, keeping in mind that the responses may simply be a polite “Thank you, I will look into it”.

The largest response rates from my markets were The UK and Latin America, without a single response from Turkey.

3.14 Cross:

Cross was also one of the ways to try and acquire more clients, the platform Salesforce work by being this sharing platform where the entire company can see what a certain employee is doing or who are his or her clients. This system is both good and bad, on one hand, there is this sharing environment where everybody is connected, but at the same time the problem lays exactly in everybody being connected.

Once a new client with potential entered the system, they would be bombarded with presentation emails from other brands, in order to see if they would be interested in their products. This led to ludicrous situations such as the brand ambassador not even having replied to the client and the client already having many other presentation emails; client theft was a very common situation, in which the ambassador would present a discount and some other ambassador of a different brand would give a better discount in order to steal the client.

From the example above, it may be seen that the company does not encourage healthy competition and that “anything goes”. There is not healthy competition amongst ambassadors because what matters is how much each person sells, how they do it is not relevant. This only leads to tension between co-workers and enables this rivalry between brands where any transactions would be secretive so that the clients would not be stolen.

Doing cross was something very much discussed inside the company for its unfairness and for being counterproductive – clients who received seven to ten emails would cancel any transactions with the company and were left with a terrible view of it. Some clients would even go to the extent of calling or emailing saying that if they were not removed from the company’s mailing list, they would take legal actions.

4. Challenges:

4.1 Furniture-related topics:

The integration into the team was not instantaneous, there were some challenges in trying to connect with a team where the main topic of discussion is furniture, the group brands and other related subjects. As someone who had never worked on this sort of area before it was difficult to actually understand what the subject was. However, after the first weeks and an increase in my knowledge, I can say that the integration was easier and the team was welcoming and interactive.

4.2 Phone calls:

During the four months spent in Maison Valentina, I only had to reply to one real phone call. During my time there, I practised fake phone calls with my colleagues as part of my training and in order for me to be prepared, if a real one occurred.

I received a call from a UK-based client who was interested in buying a mirror. Due to my lack of knowledge at the time, I was not able to have a fluent dialogue, many technical questions were asked about finishes and materials and to the best of my ability, I was able to answer. Apart from my lack of knowledge, I believe the surprise of a phone call also made the situation worse but the team wanted me to feel as though I was part of it, so I had to perform the same tasks as they did.

Phone calls were part of the daily life at the office, many clients prefer to phone in order to close deals or even to discuss further aspects.

I did not have any other phones calls myself but from watching my colleagues I can describe some difficulties this task presents: many of the clients are not from English-speaking countries so their English was not always understandable, Middle East, Africa and Asian countries were some of the most challenging. The clients would sometimes make up pieces or finishes or even demand certain customization that did not exist and the ambassadors had

to work around those questions. The urgency in acquiring the pieces was also a recurrent issue as even though it was stated that there was an extensive lead-time, there would still be daily pressure to try to shorten the deadlines or send pieces already made for other customers.

4.3 Acquiring clientele:

Amongst the many challenges given to me daily, after the training period, acquiring clients from my markets was perhaps my most difficult task, the markets I had were particularly hard to work with and I struggled.

The UK was already a completely full market, although the client offer was vast (there are many interior designers, architects and hotels, amongst others), almost all of them already knew or worked with somebody from the brand. England was the market with the most potential but as mentioned it was already overcrowded, so instead I decided to focus on the other three countries; even though there was an effort on my part, there were not many clients with the financial background to acquire pieces from the group.

I used another strategy, presenting myself to clients who had worked with the brand and suggest or ask them if they were doing any bathroom projects. This once again was not a successful strategy but at least I was able to establish some contact and remind them of the brand.

Turkey was a country I barely received leads from because their interior design culture is not very strong like in other countries, I tried as well to do an email approach with images and tried to captivate the client, but I was unsuccessful. This may have occurred not only due to the country's view on interior design but also because the country is facing political instability, which places interior design as a secondary priority. This impression was based on the small number of interior designers and the simplicity of the projects that came to my knowledge, especially when compared to the orders made from other markets, like the Russian Federation, which were characterised by their opulence and grandiosity.

Lastly, although Latin America comprises many countries, it was also a market that did not sell as expected. Of all the countries, I must refer that Mexico was the one with the most potential but it was the only country that I shared with a fellow worker. We would get mostly students asking for 3D of our pieces and to those I did reply, however when the lead had commercial potential, it was transferred to my colleague.

As with the other countries mentioned above, I tried to send captivating emails, however, this time I would write them in Spanish so that the client who received them had a better chance of understanding them. Like in Turkey, most LA countries are going through political instability and the financial disparities are enormous, which makes the luxury furniture design an area that appeals to a small niche and not to the general population. The only possible clients I was able to obtain were luxury hotels and villas, but the interest never led to any actual business deal.

Chapter IV – Covet’s mixed business model

As a result of the empirical observations during my internship, it was clear that the Covet Group uses a combination of two different business models, incorporating American characteristics into the predominant European model widely in use in Portugal. Therefore, this chapter will describe and compare both models, as well as their corporate cultural parameters, as identified by two leading authors, Geert Hoffsted and Alfons Trompennars.

5 United States of America and Portugal

5.1 Contextualization: The rise of the American models in Europe

American business models (Capitalism) became popular after the end of WWII, when a strong and victorious America arose as the saviour of a devastated Europe, generating admiration for the country and also for their business values (liberal market economy).

In order to help a post-war Europe, the USA came up with an economic plan, called The Marshall Plan:

The Marshall Plan, also known as the European Recovery Program, was a U.S. program providing aid to Western Europe following the devastation of World War II. It was enacted in 1948 and provided more than \$15 billion to help finance rebuilding efforts on the continent. (History.com. (2018, September 17). Marshall Plan [Webpage]. Retrieved from <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/marshall-plan-1>)

This help came with second intentions – let us not forget that this period is set as the beginning of the cold war between the USA and the Soviet Union. Americans wanted to stop communism and the spread of the Russian influence in Europe so they offered their help and funds and at the same time, avoided any Russian influence entering the majority of the European soil.

What the Marshall Plan did was fund the winners of the war, Great Britain, France and Belgium, because there was a belief that if these countries managed to get their economy and factories moving, the rest of Europe would recover through them. To note that countries got more or less aid based on the help they provided during the war.

If this plan worked or not is still an on-going debate among historians, but for the cultural part of it, there is no denying that it did affect Europe positively.

For the first time, Europe was filled with the American lifestyle, some European countries were free from dictatorships for the first time and were eager to embrace new things, so the

American culture spread fast with the help from the movie industry, media, fashion, music and not soon after Europe had suffered a complete Americanisation.

Although it brought many positive aspects into the lives of many Europeans, when regarding the business models, what appeared to be an easy transition, did not happen as predicted. In theory, this Americanisation of the business models was meant to help boost productivity and restart the industries, but the Europeans, fearing the aggressive means of the American ways, resisted the implementation of their models. There was also a fear of American control over the industries and economies of European countries. As mentioned, this was the cold war period, and influence was one of the main points in the fight against the Soviets.

One interesting example of this is the Italian case, where resistance to the introduction of American advertising methods in the 1950s and 1960s came from the two opposing ends of the social and political spectrum: the Catholic Church and the Communist Party. Their 'antiindustrial prejudice' and hostility towards advertising appears to have slowed down, though not stopped, the creation of an US-style consumer society in Italy (Segreto). The more conservative parties feared the country would become an aggressive consumer society. (Kipping, M & Tiratsoo, N. (2002). *Americanisation in 20th Century Europe: business, culture, politics*. Volume 2. (p.19) Retrieved from <https://books.openedition.org/irhis/1935>)

Even though some countries refused the American business models, they withdrew inspiration from them and built their own business, American-inspired model according to European standards.

Even in a supposedly anti-American country such as France, managers were prone to use American management vocabulary, while the US-based management gurus were frequently quoted in the business journals (Lanthier, *apud* Kipping & Tiratsoo, 2002: 14)

What above all failed in this Americanisation of Europe was that they were two different continents, they did not have the same raw material, factories, mentalities or developments. Europe would never be able to catch up with the American markets nor with its mass production.

Overall, the Marshall plan benefited Europe, if not for their suggestions, mentalities and dreams of innovation, it set Europe into the right course of the business and market model we have today.

5.2 The USA Business model

The American business model can be separated into three categories, the cooperative, the state and the private business (Shopify. (2019, October 20) Business Structures. [Webpage]. Retrieved from shopify.com). The first is a business model in which a company is managed by a board of people, who make the decisions together and assign a task to the managers of each department. The State business is an enterprise managed almost entirely by the government, it is a partnership between a private corporation and the state that aim to benefit both parties. Lastly, one person who manages all of the staff exclusively manages the Private business and call of the decisions – this model also allows for a partnership between two elements on the managing of the company. It can, for example, be a matter of one being the CEO while the other is the COO, or it can simply be an equal share of the company in which both are CEOs.

The American business culture is quintessential to Individualism, all individuals are expected to have freedom in their daily and professional life and should be able to make their own decisions, as opposed to being told what to do. The employee must perform a task and the employer must reward him or her for the completion of the task. There is no room for sentimentalism, the job must be done quickly and precisely or the person will be replaced in a heartbeat.

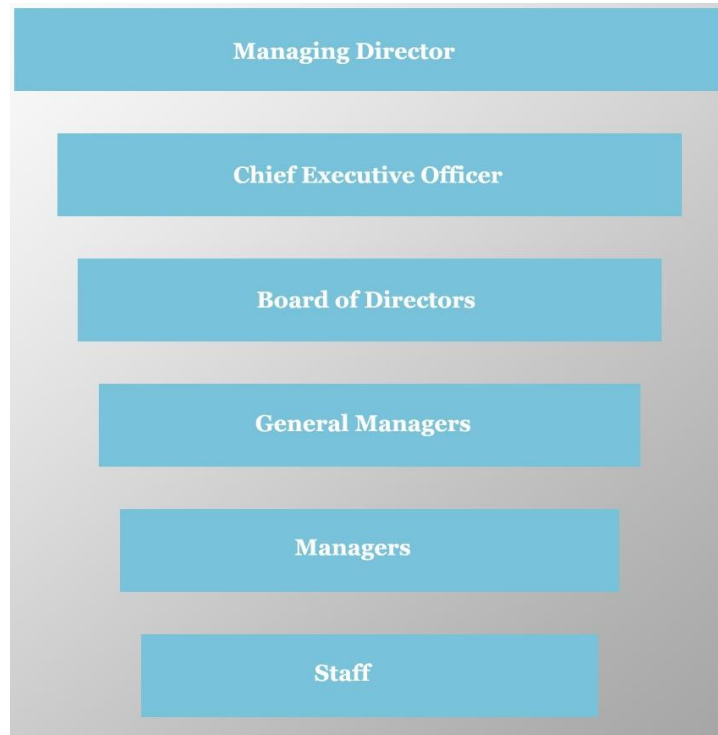
5.3 Organizational chart:

As seen on Chapter II, on the Covet's organizational chart, their staff distribution is quite different from the typical Portuguese one, but as we will see ahead it is not also completely truthful to the American one, it can be seen as a mix of both models.

This creates a unique organizational chart that perhaps withdraws the best aspects of the two models and creates a supposedly functional and more profitable working style.

As we can see on the graph below, the managing director is the owner of the company, he or she can either be its original founder or an heir.

Figure 16 - USA Business Hierarchy



Source: Hierarchystructure.com

The Chief Executive Officer, more commonly known as the CEO, is the second most important person within a company. (S)he is responsible for the daily tasks, decision making, managing and for the overall positive performance of the company. They work alongside other elements to ensure that profit is generated and that the company is running smoothly.

The board of directors is quite common in American companies, they are usually a group of individuals from different areas (finances, law, managing...) that answer to the managing director and are usually responsible for approving budgets or certain decisions that must be in conformity with what the managing director seeks to obtain.

The general manager works on a more informal level, (s)he is responsible for managing the managers of the team, usually they are assigned by state or even by geographical location (north, south...). They are responsible for motivating the teams, keeping quality standards, general organization...

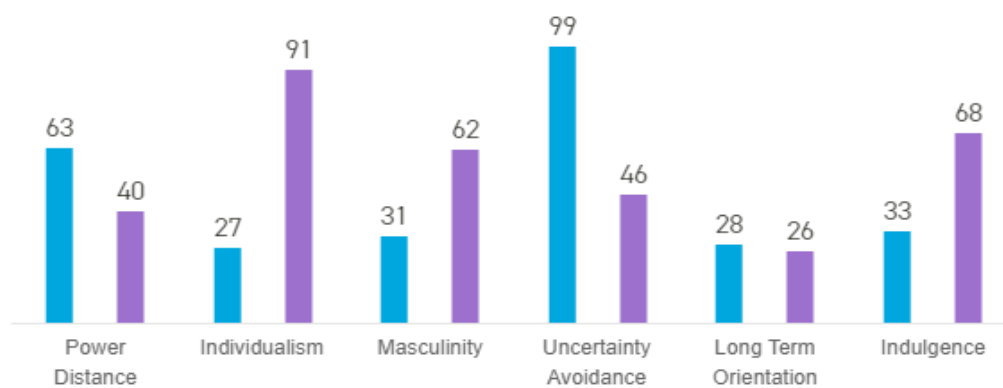
The managers respond to the general manager and are the ones that work closely with the staff. They, like the general managers, are meant to ensure that the staff is organized and motivated and also solve daily problems that might arise. They are also responsible for dealing with suppliers.

Lastly, although the staff is at the bottom of the pyramid, their function is just as important as any other. Employees are the foundation of a company, if they are motivated and perform well, they will generate more profit and will maintain the company going.

This perhaps is what Covet lacks, their high turnover of employees never allows for a complete settlement of the teams and gives the company an unfavourable working environment, where workers do not feel valued or appreciated, as they see themselves as easily replaceable. This not only is counterproductive for employees' productivity but it also gives the people a sense that they cannot trust the company in terms of their professional stability.

6. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory:

Figure 17 – Comparison by Country, Portugal & USA



Source: Hofstede-insights.com

To better understand how business works both in America and in Portugal, I believe it is necessary for us to look into the national cultures of each country. Hofstede (2019) argues, through his cultural model, that culture can influence the workplace environment and the way business is conducted.

The model is divided into six categories:

- Power distance;
- Individualism;
- Masculinity;
- Uncertainty avoidance;
- Long term orientation;

- Indulgence.

It is important to notice that the above graph represents the countries and not individuals. Portugal is represented in blue while the USA are represented in purple.

The power distance is characterized as “the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.” (Hofstede 2019).

In Portugal this parameter is higher than in the USA, due to the large distrust people have in the politicians who rule the country. As we know, the USA has a different political system and even though distrust can also be felt, Americans are led by values so the politicians explore those in order to win the trust of their electors. Overall, there is a general feeling that power and money are more equally distributed than they truly are.

The second category is individualism, as mentioned before, individualism is not only the base of business but also of lifestyle in the USA. Inspired by the famous “American Dream”, an individual with no resources should be able to turn their situation around and become a successful person. What this individualism preaches is that an individual should be free to do or act as they please, without following pre-defined ideas of the society they are inserted in.

When it comes to business, this is seen as a strength, there should be a constant pursuit to improve oneself and to perform better than others, there is no time for sentimentalism and worrying about others as this is often seen as a weakness. The only thought should be on the well-being of the individual. This sort of attitude tends to praise uniqueness and originality.

An individualistic culture has autonomy and independence, which seems suitable in the “land of the free”; however, there are of course, many issues with this sort of cultural approach as it can lead to discrimination, hate, racism and xenophobia.

Portugal is quite the opposite, it is a collective society where the feelings of mutual help and solidarity are the base of society. Doing what is best for the greater good is more important than individual performance. When it comes to business, collective societies tend to perform better, due to their ability to work as a team, which allows for faster achievement of the common goals. Neither the individualistic nor the collectivist drives are perfect or ideal but they appear to work in the countries where they can be found.

Regarding the masculinity standard, this author asserts that the USA is a masculine country and Portugal is a feminine country. The Americans are more inclined towards values such

as success and wealth. On the other side of the spectrum are the Portuguese, who value quality of life and comfort. When looking into it from a business perspective, we can conclude that the Portuguese are more inclined to understand personal reasons as a justification for something, while for example, the Americans will not.

The Uncertainty Avoidance:

The Uncertainty Avoidance dimension expresses the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. Countries exhibiting strong UAI maintain rigid codes of belief and behaviour, and are intolerant of unorthodox behaviour and ideas. Weak UAI societies maintain a more relaxed attitude in which practice counts more than principles. (*Idem*)

Portugal has the maximum of UAI, which means that the country fears uncertainty, mainly because of some degree of inability to be autonomous in almost every single aspect of society, from fuel, food, clothing to energetic consumption. The country is too small to be able to provide the necessary resources to its inhabitants, which contributes to the overall fear of uncertainty. On the other hand we have the USA, which is a big exporter of many of the basic living needs (food, oil...) making their UAI much lower, as there is a general perception that they are able to self-regulate their economy and are able to supply the entire country with just their own national production.

Long-term orientation is related to the countries' traditions – those that are still very attached to the old ways and past traditions are considered normative countries, while the others are considered pragmatic. Curiously enough, on this parameter, both countries are fairly similar and are considered normative, which means they value old traditions, the countries' history, the glory of the past, the discoveries...

Pragmatic countries tend to be more innovative, they want to modernize themselves and leave the past behind, these countries are usually progressive in some sort of area, like education, medicine... This is the case of countries like Germany and the UK.

Lastly, we have the indulgence parameter, which evaluates how a person's character is based on the environment they were brought upon. Countries can be distinguished between indulgent and restrained.

Portugal is classified as an indulgent country, which means the overall society is pessimistic, unfulfilled and unable to acquire gratification from things as simple as leisure. They believe

they are controlled by the norms of the society they are inserted on. On the other hand, the USA is a restrained country, they are contradictory, they do not follow rules yet want them to be followed. They are not afraid to reward themselves, as they know they have earned it and overall they have a more optimistic perspective on life.

7. Covet and Hofstede

When analysing the Covet Group according to Hofstede's parameters, the following characteristics may be pointed out:

With regards to the power distance, Covet would lean towards a lower PDI with some reservations. Although the line between employees and CEOs is not very well defined, there are still quite a lot of differences in salary and also in responsibility. The decision-making process is not focused on a single person but in multiple individuals.

Concerning the individualism parameter, from a micro perspective I would say they have a low IDV but at a macro level I believe they have a higher IDV. In terms of each brand's team, people look out for each other and protect each other's back, there is a constant concern with the well-being of the other. On the macro aspect of relationships, people do not care as much for each other, because there is also an on-going rivalry among brands and, as mentioned, unprofessional competitiveness.

Regarding masculinity, just like in the IDV parameter, Covet is both. Within the same team, people have a feminine inclination but when it comes to CEOs, managers and other brands it is possible to see a more masculine approach. For example, the company does not care for gender roles, leadership positions are given to both men and women. Nevertheless, there is a hierarchy that, even though flexible, it is still there and is meant to be respected. The majority of the internal conflicts are also solved through communication and compromise instead of orders from a superior.

As far as uncertainty avoidance is concerned, the Covet group has a low UAI. There is openness and acceptance, innovation is valued, problem-solving is done in a calm way and the overall environment is relaxed and tolerant.

On the long-term orientation, I believe the company is once again a mixture of both. On one hand, they value education and their professional tasks and, on the other hand, they are also curious, stubborn and have pride in their work and in their employees.

Lastly, the indulgence parameter is high like the UAI. The company is relaxed and the opinion of the employees is valued. In general, there is an optimistic and friendly environment and, as we are going to see below, they want to rise up to Google's level, which is perceived as the company that values the well-being of its workers the most.

8. Covet and Google

Throughout my internship, the company I heard talk the most about, apart from the company's competitors, was Google. There was no denying that Google was and is the main source of inspiration for the Covet Group. They would mention that they are the Portuguese Google and their aim is indeed to be a Portuguese version of it.

There is no denying that some similarities may indeed be found. They have Covet academies (learning lectures), workshops and mobility inside the working space, among others. They still have a long path to walk if they want to support their claim. As mentioned before, they still have a strong Portuguese root that is very much present, such as the punch clock for entering and leaving that is strictly monitored, or the lack of individuality and creativeness, amid other aspects...

Google focuses above all on the well-being of its workers, due to the fact that they believe that a happy employee is a motivated one, which results in a boost of productivity. This is perhaps the main factor Covet needs to focus on, as the general atmosphere felt in Maison Valentina was not of complete professional fulfilment nor well-cherished employees.

9. Portuguese business model (Europeanisation)

Even though the Covet Group tries to adopt the characteristics of American corporations, it still is a European company, which develops its main business in Europe. They still suffer from a process that authors such as Ladrech have called Europeanisation. As much as they would like to follow the American business model, with aggressive ways and less friendly techniques, they are still located in a European country so they have to follow the EU regulations on business.

The concept of Europeanisation is quite difficult to grasp, but Ladrech (2001: 3) has given what may seem the closest definition:

[...] an incremental process of re-orienting the direction and shape of politics to the extent that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organisational logic of national politics and policy making.

More recently, new interpretations of the concept have arisen, inspired by Ladrech's theory:

- There is no theory of Europeanisation. Also more recent work on Europeanisation shows: 'Europeanisation is not a theory in itself, rather a phenomenon which a range of theoretical approaches have sought to explain' [...];
- Europeanisation is mainly used to look at the impact of the EU on member states. Europeanisation therefore, could be defined more concrete as 'EU-ization' [...];
- Europeanisation is not the same as European integration. 'European integration is concerned with political and policy development at the supranational level, where Europeanisation is concerned with the consequences of this process for (chiefly) the member states' (Graziano and Vink, 2008: 47; Bulmer and Lequesne, 2002: 16, *apud* Den Bak 2009).

When Europeanisation is applied to business, it can be looked at as an attempt of turning business more European, which results in having a company that follows a standard set of rules that appeal to a certain group of consumers. This model succeeds because of the European single market.

10. Trompenaars and the seven dimensions of culture

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, like Hofstede, are responsible for a cultural model. This particular one applied to the working environments and business cultures. They claim that each culture has their differences and that it is important to know them well in order to avoid any conflicts between co-workers from different cultural backgrounds.

Together, they spent over ten years researching the topic. Their research was conducted in thousands of workplaces and the collecting of data was made through questionnaires sent to over 50 countries for people in all positions inside companies to reply.

They named it the Seven Dimensions of Culture and before analysing the parameters that they propose for this model, we must first understand a basic concept that is hard to define, culture. To the authors, "culture is the way in which a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas" (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1998: 6). These dilemmas can arise from three different problems, namely relationships, time and the environment. Therefore, to further understand their theory it becomes necessary to explore these three dilemmas with a critical point of view, which will be done below.

10.1 Relationships

On this parameter, the author distinguishes five main differences that people have when dealing with others:

- Universalism/ Particularism
- Individualism/Communitarianism
- Neutral/Emotional
- Specific/Diffuse
- Achievement/Ascription

10.1.1 Universalism/ Particularism

This first dichotomy can be defined as:

This first dimension defines how we judge other people's behaviour. There are two "pure" yet alternative types of judgment. At one extreme we encounter an obligation to adhere to standards which are universally agreed to by the culture in which we live. "Do not lie. Do not steal. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (the Golden Rule), and so on. At the other extreme we encounter particular obligations to people we know. "X is my dear friend, so obviously I would not lie to him or steal from him. It would hurt us both to show less than kindness to one another. (*Idem*, 1998: 31)

Universalist countries such as the UK and Scandinavia value rules and order above anything, people should be punished or judged fairly by following a standardized set of rules.

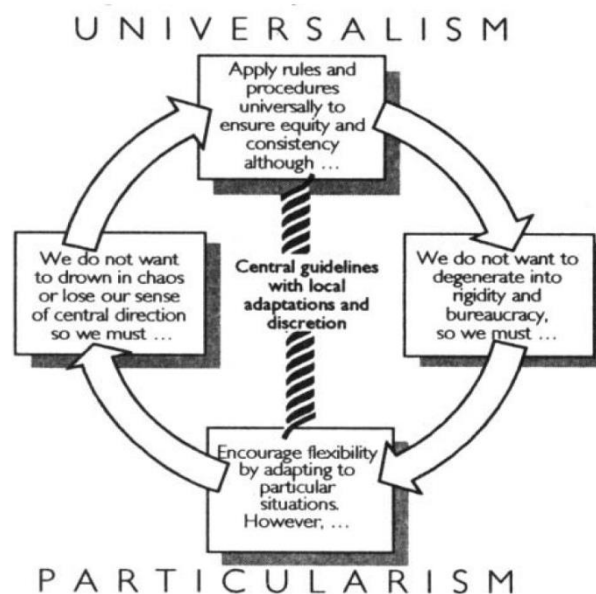
In countries such as China and Russia, it is quite the opposite (particularism). They value the person instead of the rules, people are different and rules may not all apply to the same situation. They value friendship and personality more than they value laws.

Both groups tend to be suspicious of each other, since universalist countries see particularism countries as too friendly and more prone to benefit their acquaintances. Particularism countries, on the other hand, tend to see the others as cold and emotionless, who would rather see the problem than the person.

It is also believed that countries who are universalist are more developed and modern as opposed to those who favour the other orientation, which is associated with small and rural countries.

From a business point of view, it is interesting to notice that there is usually a larger inclination to follow universalism, which allows for a professional relationship instead of a personal one. Contracts and business transactions would be straight forward and there would be a reassurance that the law and the established deadlines would be fulfilled. This approach is also a guarantee in the sense that the power is focused on a single individual as opposed to several, which makes the overall business transaction an unpretentious process.

Figure 18 - The balance of Universalism and Particularism



Source: Riding the waves of culture: Understanding cultural diversity in business (p.44)

As we can see from the graph, on the one hand universalism can be too focused on rules and procedures which may come across as rigid and bureaucracy-oriented. On the other hand, particularism can become too flexible and lead to chaos. The authors claim that ideally, a company should be a mix of both as they would balance each other's eccentricities – like a modern, corporate version of yin and yang, they are both necessary as they complement each other.

10.1.2 Individualism/ Communitarianism

Also referred to as the individual and the group, the first focuses on the needs of the individual who comes before anybody else, while in communitarian cultures the group is the most important thing. Individualism focuses on the goals that are set and meant to be reached by one person while communitarianism focuses on the group's common goals as they are meant to be reached as a whole.

Some examples of countries which follow this theory are Canada and the UK (individualistic) and Latin American as a communitarian country. Once again, individualism is seen as a characteristic of modern societies. People should work for themselves and not for the good of others but, like in the other parameters described above, they also complement each other and balance out their exaggerations.

From a business point of view, these two approaches are quite different. The individualistic companies favour personal effort, creativity and a rewarding system for those who excel. In communitarian countries, teamwork is valued and rewards should be given to the team for its performance.

It is also important to notice that individualistic countries prefer a single decision-maker, while communitarians ones prefer a group. Rarely will communitarian cultures go to a business meeting without an entourage and it would be a shock if the other side did not also show up with a group of people. This is seen as a display of power – if you have many people surrounding you, then you must be an important person. The process of decision making is also quite different, the group countries will take longer as they will discuss with all of the parties involved and will only make a final decision if everybody agrees. The individualistic cultures, as mentioned, only have one decision-maker, so the answer is sometimes given immediately as there is no need to consult anybody else's opinion. Decision-making can also be done by voting, an action that group countries despise and see as disrespectful.

Individualistic and communitarian cultures also have extremely different views on a company's organization. In an individualistic culture, employees are seen as replaceable pieces whose only goal is to serve one individual. It is more of a negotiation than a job, you give something and in return you get paid.

In communitarian cultures, there is an interest in relationships among co-workers and the owner of the said corporation. The workers are valued and made to feel secure about their position in the company.

In the following image, we can see some useful tips for conducting business with these two cultures:

Figure 19 - Tips for doing business with Individualists and Communitarians

Tips for doing business with:	
Individualists (for communitarians)	Communitarians (for individualists)
1 Prepare for quick decisions and sudden offers not referred to HQ.	1 Show patience for time taken to consent and to consult.
2 Negotiator can commit those who sent him or her and is very reluctant to go back on an undertaking.	2 Negotiator can only agree tentatively and may withdraw an undertaking after consulting with superiors.
3 The toughest negotiations were probably already done within the organisation while preparing for the meeting. You have a tough job selling them the solution to this meeting.	3 The toughest negotiations are with the communitarians you face. You must somehow persuade them to cede to you points which the multiple interests in your company demand.
4 Conducting business alone means that this person is respected by his or her company and has its esteem.	4 Conducting business when surrounded by helpers means that this person has high status in his or her company
5 The aim is to make a quick deal.	5 The aim is to build lasting relationships.

Source: Riding the waves of culture: Understanding cultural diversity in business (p.67)

Individualistic cultures value being straightforward and fast in decision-making. The deals should be closed as fast as possible and by a single decision-maker. Communitarians prefer things to be done slowly. They like to be flattered and made to feel important by their counterparts. Having a big group of people surrounding the decisions-maker is very important and their personal relationship is valued.

10.1.3 Neutral/Emotional

These two parameters are related to how people express their emotions. Neutral people tend not to display their emotions publicly, they are rational and view life through a rational point of view. Displaying sentiment is seen as a weakness and there is constant subduing of people's feelings. We must keep in mind that just because these cultures try to be emotionless, it does not mean that they are cold or are unable to recognise evident feelings

amongst their business partners or professional relations. Countries like the UK and Sweden are classified within this group.

On the emotional side, people show their feelings constantly, even in the workplace. This display of emotions conveys a reassuring feeling that the person is being honest and sincere. Italy and Spain are examples of emotional countries.

There are also countries that, even though appear to fit in only one of the categories, do not. They may convey emotions in personal relationships but will be neutral in professional ones.

Humour is also something to take into consideration, cultures who are neutral may give the impression of being emotional by using humour. This is mostly used to “break the ice” or to lighten the mood before, let us say, an important meeting or presentation. What happens in the majority of the situations is that the other part may not understand where the humour is coming from and see it as an insult. In some cultures, humorous moments during a presentation can be seen as though the person is not taking things seriously.

The way cultures communicate among themselves is perhaps the most important part of any professional transaction. Body language, attitude and even the way somebody presents itself can state a lot about a company and an individual. The most well-known way of communicating is verbal. In some cultures talking for long periods of time is seen as a positive statement, while on others, keeping it short and allowing for questions during the presentation shows just how well prepared the person is.

Silence is also frequently seen as a bad sign for some cultures but for others is merely a way to check if the message is getting across. The tone of the voice is also an important feature of any meeting or presentation:

Figure 20 - Tones of voice of Anglo Saxons, Latin and Oriental cultures

Figure 6.3 Tone of voice



Source: Riding the waves of culture: Understanding cultural diversity in business (p.75)

As we can see from the figure above, the tone of the voice changes according to the culture. To the Anglo Saxon, speaking with a high pitch is seen as if though the person is not taking the matter seriously. On Latin culture it is quite the opposite, high-pitch tones show just how committed and passionate the person is towards the subject. Lastly, in Oriental culture, the tone of voice should be monochord and calm, in order to show respect and professionalism.

Apart from verbal communication, non-verbal communication also plays a crucial role in communication. Eye contact, body language, personal space and privacy are the most important ways of communicating without words. Like other aspects of communication, it must be adapted according to the culture and situation, as, depending on the country, it may be considered rude or disrespectful.

10.1.4 Specific/Diffused

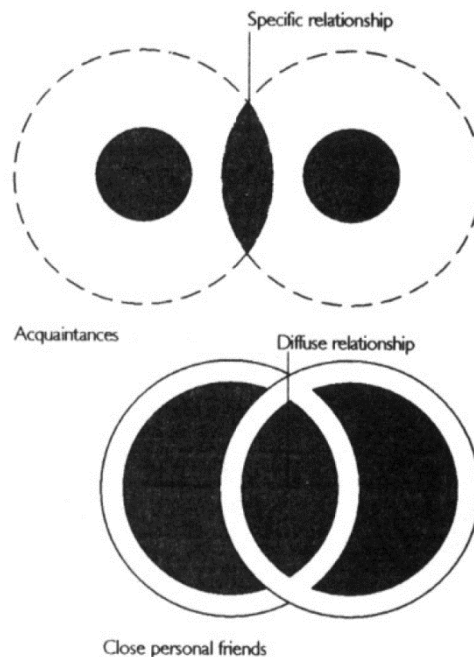
Below is Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner's definition of the parameters we are now going to look into:

Closely related to whether we show emotions in dealing with other people is the degree to which we engage others in specific areas of life and single levels of personality, or diffusely in multiple areas of our lives and at several levels of personality at the same time. (*Ibidem*, 1998: 81)

On specific cultures, work and personal lives are kept separate at all times. Co-workers and bosses are not expected to maintain any sort of relationship apart from the one they have on the workplace, as it is believed that separating the two does not have any direct effect on workplace productivity. People are expected to work together without any sort of personal relationship as the workplace can sometimes be seen as just a place for transactions to happen, instead of a friendly and relaxed environment. Examples of (BocadoLobo. (2019, February 14). Our Story. [Webpage]. Retrieved from bocadolobo.com) specific countries are the UK and the USA.

In diffuse cultures, it is quite the opposite, work and personal life walk hand in hand with each other. It is believed that people who share a friendship outside the office and let others into their personal life are better co-workers and develop long-lasting relationships that benefit the workplace environment. It is also said that the same happens with possible clients – companies who spend time outside the office nurturing the friendship are more successful and have higher chances of future business transactions. This success comes from the fact that business deals are built upon mutual trust instead of just a simple and emotionless business transaction. An example of a diffuse country is Argentina and Russia.

Figure 21 - Circles of acquaintances of diffuse and specific cultures



Source: Riding the waves of culture: Understanding cultural diversity in business (p 82)

Psychologist Lewis Kurt created this graph to better showcase how these two types of culture manoeuvre inside their relationship circle. The specific cultures keep their personal life to themselves, they do not allow anyone out of their family circle to enter it. However, they maintain a specific relationship, which is only there for the work colleagues, and the two relationships never intertwine.

In diffuse relationships, there is not a clear line of where the personal relationships and professional relations begin or end, they are completely intertwined and cannot be separated as they are the base of each other.

It can sometimes be a challenge when people from countries with two different views on relationships try to do business. There are frequent misunderstandings regarding situations, one culture wants to keep it professional while the other wants to keep it more casual and from time to time, they can, without meaning to, be insulting to each other. One culture may prefer to close business outside the office, while the other may find that insulting or a complete waste of time.

Specific cultures focus more on the task at hands or on the business deal than on the relationship. As opposed to them, diffuse cultures focus more on the relationships as they see it as a safekeeping. A word can be worth more than a signature on a paper and in the end, long-lasting relationships will be much more profitable in the long term.

Companies that follow this style of management also have less turnover of workers, as they value building a strong relationship and listening to the needs of the worker above everything else. This does not happen in specific cultures, where the worker can be easily replaced; since there are no friendship ties, it just makes the overall process more swiftly. Diffuse cultures also tend to adapt to their workers' lives, if an employee has financial problems, the boss may feel more inclined to understand the situation and adjust the salary according to their needs.

It is convenient to keep in mind certain aspects, so that business transactions can run smoothly for both parts, specific cultures value:

- Being straightforward, honest, responsible and having a strong character;
- Efficient, quick and well-timed meetings are appreciated;
- Excessive formality is advised against, too much title formality can be seen as bragging;

- Personal and professional activities should be kept separated at all times;
- Emotions should not be part of business transactions;
- Meetings should be precise and easy to understand.

Diffuse cultures value:

- Casual and friendly business relationships that are not forced upon the two parts;
- Meetings should not be rushed nor analytical, they should be taken slowly and may even separate into multiple ones;
- It is important to respect the other person's titles and position, it is important not to forget that there is a hierarchy;
- Private and professional will sometimes mix, business deals may be closed outside the office;
- You must not judge someone immediately, it is important to keep in mind their background and personal life;
- Being vague is done to allow the employee to be creative and conjure interesting solutions to problems that may arise.

10.1.5 Achievement/Ascription

Achievement and Ascription are related to the person's status and their overall achievements in lives. Achievement cultures value who the person currently is, where they have managed to come so far in life. Ascription cultures valued the background, where the person grew-up, which schools they attended, how much power and influence the person has. The attitude and overall behaviour the other will have towards the person will be set on these characteristics. The US and Canada are achievement countries, while France and Japan are ascription countries. Ascription cultures are often associated with higher religious influence on the country and therefore are seen as a characteristic of a more conservative one.

Business transactions among the two parts can be quite challenging. Ascription cultures tend to revolve around a leader who tells the team in which direction to go, while achievement cultures tend to send their best young achievers to add yet another conquest to their list. These young and motivated workers can be quite aggressive in their way of dealing with others, which is considered rude to older workers.

Translation is a problem among these two cultures. In ascription culture, the translator is seen as a manipulative part who will translate what favours his or her team instead of being

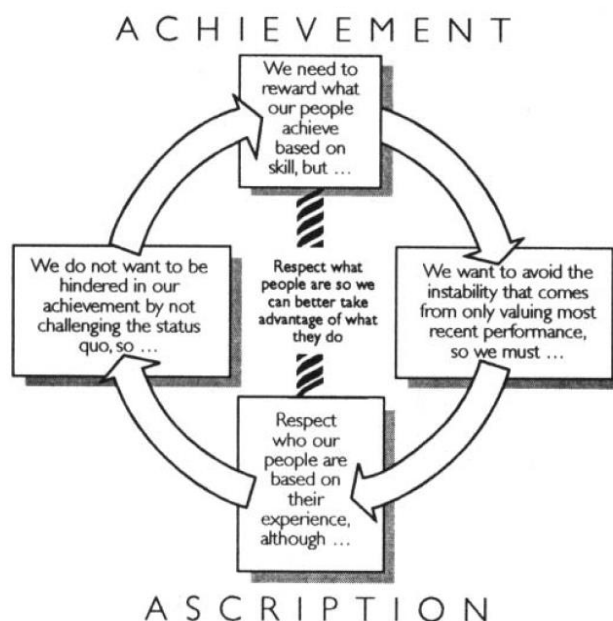
completely impartial. To achievement cultures, the translator is trying to achieve something for him or herself so the translation is not neutral but rather a flourished and polished explanation.

Titles must also be kept in mind. In ascription cultures, presenting oneself as “Doctor” or “Director” can be seen as bragging as it is considered useless information for the business process. On achievement cultures, it is almost mandatory to address people by their title because it shows the person’s deeds. In the matter of titles, it is also important to mention that the person’s age plays a relevant role, to some cultures sending a young person to handle a meeting single-handed can bring some suspicious about their professional career and instantly kill the possibility of a business transaction.

Achievement cultures tend to have a hierarchy based on experience, age and overall performance. If an individual excels at his or her job, they should be given a leadership role. Ascribed cultures do not have an experience-based hierarchy, the person is simply assigned to that position because it has the most suitable background for it.

The line separating these two cultural specifications is not easy to draw, cultures that are ascribed will to some degree also be achievers, and vice versa. In addition, the two trends will also balance each other out.

Figure 22 - The achievement and ascription balance



Source: Riding the waves of culture: Understanding cultural diversity in business (p.116)

As we can from the graph, both cultures need each other to maintain a healthy balance.

Achievement cultures tend to be unfair in their rewarding systems, overlooking performance over experience. Ascription culture cannot overlook people's status and sometimes forget the person's accomplishments and experience.

10.2 Time

On this chapter, the authors focus on the importance of time for cultures and companies. They separate it into three stages: past, present and future and how it influences their lives and decision-making processes.

Companies must, above all, know how to manage time, as it is their most precious asset. This valorisation of time is different from culture to culture and it is on that value that this chapter will focus its attention.

It is possible to separate the division of time into two, the sequential and synchronic time, the sequential can be characterized as:

Time can be legitimately conceived of as a line of sequential events passing us at regular intervals. It can also be conceived of as cyclical and repetitive, compressing past, present and future by what these have in common: seasons and rhythms. At one extreme, then, we have the person who conceives of time as a dotted line with regular spacings. Events are organised by the number of intervals before or after their occurrence. Everything has its time and place as far as the sequential thinker is concerned. Any change or turbulence in this sequence will make the sequential person more uncertain. (*Ibidem*:1998: 123)

Synchronic time is quite the opposite, instead of following a timeline, people have different events occurring simultaneously. For some cultures this concept is impossible to grasp. Edward Hall called this juggling of time "polychronic", due to the number of tasks performed at the same time. For synchronic cultures, their agenda is their most important asset, they like to have everything extremely well organized so that their time can be worth even more. They show their appreciation with their time, being present and taking the time to greet the other is their most flattering attitude.

Cottle(*Ibidem*, 1998: 125) developed a test that allows us to better understand how different cultures value their past, present and future. Below we see two countries that will serve as an example.

Figure 23 - Circles of Cottle regarding Japan and USA.



Source: Riding the waves of culture: Understanding cultural diversity in business (p 127)

The three circles represent the order mentioned above; as we can see, in Japan the circles are completely inside each other, with the present and future circle being the largest. We can conclude that the Japanese society lives in the present and is always thinking about the future, however, the interconnection of the three circles tells us that they can never fully let go of their traditions and past achievements. Japan also believes that history and rituals should be preserved and that society should not worry about its future, as the future is already decided by the past. It is also possible to conclude by the touching of the circles of the past and the future, that they are always connected to each other, they follow a sequential timeline. To Japanese culture, life and business should not be rushed, it is important to let them follow their course in all aspects of life and not forget that traditions come before anything else.

The USA has a completely different set of circles, theirs do not intertwine, they are connected but do not influence each other. The future is the largest circle because there is constant worrying about the future, they live in the present but are always thinking about the future of their children, careers, country...To them the past is insignificant, it is done with, and they should focus and be prepared for what is coming in the future.

The American circle design shows this country as the ideal business partner, they are focused on the common goal and tend to be swift and precise in their decision-making processes. As mentioned before, their individualistic culture is what makes them live a fast-paced life, where individuals must race amongst themselves to be the best. However, this can lead to some problems, time management is so strict that people tend to feel stressed and even prioritize their jobs over other aspects of their lives, such as their family or friends. For a culture to succeed in a business environment they must adapt themselves to the other cultures and also see how they can improve their own.

10.3 Relationships and time

The way professional relationships are seen in the workplace is directly connected to the perception each culture has of time.

Sequential cultures tend to see relationships as just a means to an end, the sooner they close the deal, the better, because what they seek above all is gratification for their actions. Fulfilling the schedule and doing it within the established time-table is vital for these cultures.

Synchronic cultures are more interested in building long-lasting relationships based on trust and respect. They believe that trusting the other not only leads to business in the present, but it will also allow for future transactions.

To summarize these topics, let us look at the graph below, which recapitulates the perception of time in different cultures.

Figure 24 - Concepts of time to Sequential and Synchronic cultures

Recognising time orientation	
Sequential	Synchronic
1 Only do one activity at a time.	1 Do more than one activity at a time.
2 Time is seizable and measurable.	2 Appointments are approximate and subject to "giving time" to significant others.
3 Keep appointments strictly; schedule in advance and do not run late.	3 Schedules are generally subordinate to relationships.
4 Relationships are generally subordinate to schedule.	4 Strong preference for following where relationships lead.
5. Strong preference for following initial plans.	

Source: Riding the waves of culture: Understanding cultural diversity in business (p 139)

Sequential cultures are organized, methodical, distant and straightforward, while synchronic cultures are relationship-based, multitaskers and have a more relaxed view on time management.

10.4 Environment

The last parameter to keep in mind according to Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner is the environment where cultures are inserted and their point of view towards it.

Here we can distinguish two types of corporations, the inner-directed and the outer-directed. The first believe that nature should be exploited for the profit of humanity and that we should be able to control it in order to collect all of its benefits. The second sees nature as the promoter of their success and therefore it should be respected and cherished.

European countries tended to be inner-directed as they were under significant religious influence for many centuries. This influence stated that nature should be controlled and that natural catastrophes were a mere representation of the will of the religious entities. This point of view has evolved and passed through three stages that may be distinguished, into Primitive, Renaissance and Modern.

The primitive stage valued nature and the will of the environment, the second stage already tried to control and manipulate nature to rip personal benefits, and lastly, the modern is a mix of both stages. It is a desire to control nature but at the same time to preserve it by relying on science to come up with answers to the problems humankind has created.

To understand the difference between inner and outer-directed, we can list some of its characteristics, the inner-directed are:

- Aggressive towards the environmental question;
- Self-centred;
- Alarmed when nature changes and takes its course.

While the outer can be defined as:

- Flexible;
- Relaxed point of view towards nature, the natural balance must be respected;
- Worry and care for the well-being of the others before their own.

11. Hofstede VS Trompenaars/Hampden-Turner

It is interesting to compare these two author's theories as they are so different, but have the same common goal, which is to better understand culture in corporations. While Hofstede focuses more on the values individuals have or seek in the workplace, Trompenaars deals with the behaviour that different cultures have in their personal and professional lives.

Trompenaars gives us his logical view of how the workplace is organized, how people interact with different relationships and how they see the environment, they are inserted on. Hofstede tells us about the values people have inside them, the fruition of the culture they are part of, that affects their professional and personal lives.

It is curious to notice that, even though the authors suggest different theories and approaches, they do have a level of similarity, even proposing the same theories with just a simple name change. For example, Hofstede's Individualism/Collectivism versus Trompenaars' Individualism/ Communitarianism. There is no denying that Hofstede's models were the inspiration for Trompenaars.

There is an ongoing discussion about these theories, as they seem to contradict each other, they sometimes give characteristics to certain countries that may not exactly make any logical sense, as for example the German case:

After taking a look into evaluations of different cultures one can find that the results, obtained by the two theories are often counter logical. German corporate culture is hierarchical, as is claimed by Trompenaars in his studies. Whereas Hofstede identifies Germany as relatively low in terms of Power Distance. (Essays, 2018)

There are many more examples of contradictory or even imprecise points in Hofstede's theory, such as:

- The use of surveys can never be truly trusted as people can manipulate the answers;
- There is no mention of minorities or regional varieties, it is impossible to generalize a whole country when there is so much cultural diversity inside it;
- There is only one point of view to the questions asked, which makes the process confusing;
- The data is old.

Trompenaars' theory also has received criticism on the account of:

- 7 dilemmas do not feel enough for the model he proposes, they should instead be considered the foundation and more should be added to them;
- It differentiates cultures but does not propose ways of approaching nor working with them;
- The individuals' personality and perspective are not taken into consideration.

The importance of both authors on the business world is undeniable, they give companies the ability to generalize their clients and know what to expect even before shaking hands with them. It is important to know each other's cultures so that there can be a better understanding of both parts. Something as simple as verbal communication can be a problem when the two parties come from different cultures so it is important to keep the principles of the authors in mind.

Above all, the marketing teams are the ones that benefit the most from these theories as they provide a clear aim to follow when it comes to appealing to others. It is also in marketing that there is freedom to decide whether the company would prefer to take a cultural risk or just simply appeal to the other half. For example, with aggressive business tactics in a country where it is known that those tactics are not appreciated.

There are many other flaws to cross-culture theories but perhaps the biggest problem arises from the fact that culture is a living organism, it is interchangeable and therefore cannot be placed inside rigid boxes of assumed characteristics. Culture must be experienced to be truly understood.

Despite all the negatives aspects found towards Hofstede's business model, it continues to be the most widely used in the corporative world, due to the fact that it is easy to explain and easy to relate to the current workplace situation. After all, it was in fact the workplace where his questionnaires were applied, which eventually led to his model of corporate culture.

12. Covet and the Seven divisions of culture

As in Hofstede's model, it is interesting to see where the Covet Group is inserted on the parameters of the seven divisions of culture put forward by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner.

On the Universalism/Particularism, I believe the Covet Group leans more towards particularism, as there is a constant worry with the employees and their well-being, even if it is at a more macro level. People are promoted not only based on their performance but also on their personality and leadership abilities. A good team leader makes a good team.

The same happens at a business level, there is always an attempt to befriend the client so that the base of business relations may be this interpersonal relationship between the ambassador and the client.

On the Individualism/ Communitarianism parameter there is a mix of the two, just like in the previous one. Communitarianism is very important, people tend to work as a team and try to reach goals as one, each brand is evaluated as a whole and not as individuals.

However, there is also a speck of individualism as the work of a person can be rewarded if he or she decides to work alone and succeeds. The chances are that a higher position person will notice it and reward the effort, plus it is also important to keep in mind that some individuals do not handle teamwork well.

Another individualistic characteristic, which is also very much present, is the fast interchange of employees. In communitarian companies, there is usually a knowledge, by the chief, of the personality and work of each employee so that it is possible to establish their value inside the company and persuade them or not to stay.

From a business point of view, I believe they lean more towards the communitarian style. Decisions are discussed with the team and their point of view is taken into consideration, even though the person who will make the final decision is a single individual, he or she represents the will of the brand. They also prefer taking their time and building their relationship with a potential client rather than being straightforward and risking a once in a lifetime business transaction.

On the third parameter, Neutral/Emotional, I believe there is a greater predisposition towards the emotional side, though we must not forget that the example I am giving is based on a real workplace, where emotions and feelings are part of the daily life. On Maison Valentina, feelings were not seen as weaknesses but rather as something that would help the team bond, the majority of the team members were also friends outside the office so it was unavoidable for emotions to enter the workplace.

This emotional trait of the company also transferred to business, there would be a larger concern about the clients and their emotions, and even though they would not be directly expressed, they were underlined.

On the Specific/Diffuse parameter, the company is definitely diffuse, people share a life inside and outside the workplace, they are friends and share most parts of their lives. I believe that may be where the success of the brand I worked in comes from. As opposed to some others where it was just a professional relationship, on MV the key to success was a team that liked and cared for each other inside and outside the office.

When it came to the business relations with clients, the communication was rarely done in person so it would be difficult trying to nurture relationships; however, when it came to fairs and missions, there would be an attempt to create or develop the relationship with a client. Trust is the bargaining coin in diffuse cultures and in the Covet Group, as mentioned in chapter three, some clients would rather make business with one person instead of many, due to their relationship and mutual trust.

Lastly, we have the achievement/ascription parameter, where I believe the company leans more towards ascription, the majority of the staff that works in Covet has just left university so it is hard to judge their character in achievements, they focus more on the person's background, such as their academic training, the city they live in and their overall charisma.

Job interviews are also focused more on the person's character and personality rather than on what they have achieved up until now in life. It is important to match somebody's personality to the brand they are going to be inserted in, and that is why it is important to have such interviews.

Although the company leans towards ascription, I believe they also have some features of an achievement culture, as they encourage young people to take the lead in business and in important decision-making processes and they can be quite aggressive when doing business. Titles are not as important inside the company, but there is a hierarchy that must be respected and high-ranking positions are assigned according to the person's qualifications instead of performance.

Chapter V – Conclusion

Throughout this report, I have managed to show the intricate business and management relations found in the Covet Group, particularly in the brand Maison Valentina, where my internship was conducted. As argued, the group has been able to create a mixture of two completely different business models, combining some characteristics of European and American corporations, making them somehow work to their possible benefit. The work also highlights the importance of the furniture sector in Portugal, not only as part of our culture but also as our industrial heritage. In addition, it allows us to place Covet within certain cultural boxes so that it becomes easier to understand the way in which it operates and deals with problems.

The results obtained from the internship itself, though partial, have been able to convey the most relevant information about the group and Maison Valentina. However, the lack of available financial data was a limitation for this report, as it does not allow for a more in-depth knowledge of the group's position within the furniture sector and the Portuguese business fabric in general. On the other hand, the abundance of literature about furniture-related topics posed an additional difficulty, as it was hard to analyse and properly filter the data, in most cases scattered throughout a variety of sources.

In spite of these obstacles, the internship in the Covet Group allowed me to broaden my horizons and get a different perspective on the corporate world. During my time there I was able to improve my overall knowledge and acquire new one in fields I had never delved into before, such as furniture, management, sales software and even team-leadership. This was possible due to the master's degree in Intercultural Studies for Business, which allowed me to have a prior foundation for the work I was meant to perform during my time as a trainee – the culture classes I attended, such as English and Spanish business culture, gave me an overview and prepared me to deal with many foreign markets. This permitted me to be prepared to approach and manage business relations with the said markets, as they gave me an insight into how these cultures view the business world. Subjects related to math and computer programs, such as Intercultural Economic relations and Intercultural Communication Technologies, allowed me to be prepared to deal with new management software and also to already have previous knowledge in others, such as Excel. The Economics Relations subject was particularly important, due to the fact that it was part of the daily tasks to manage and provide quotations or budgets to foreign clients, as well as to calculate different taxes and percentages, which thanks to that particular subject I was already prepared to do.

The internship permitted me to gain specific knowledge, for example, in Salesforce and in furniture platforms, which I would never be able to obtain if I had not done an internship. It also allowed me to better understand how complex the corporative business environment is and just how hard it is to balance employees and their needs while maintaining a productive atmosphere for everybody inside the company. It gave me a unique opportunity of putting to use what I had been taught in the master's program, by allowing me to be in direct contact with other cultures and international clients.

Considering the relevance that the furniture sector has in Portugal, and the potential for growth and internationalization (as the Covet Group is already showing us), more attention should be paid to the business models adopted by most of the companies in this sector, which is characterised by family-business SMEs. The group where my internship took place is a somewhat atypical example and does not allow for a broad generalisation about the sector as a whole. Therefore, more research is needed in order to study the strategies followed by most furniture-related companies, which could lead to establishing patterns of behaviour that help understand their performance and enhance their chances of success in a global market. This is especially true in the case of Portugal, where the domestic market is not big enough to absorb the national production of furniture. Consequently, the study of foreign markets, particularly of those that are culturally distant from Europe, is an urgent matter that may lead to the acquisition of new clients in less saturated markets.

I hope that this report may help anybody interested in working in the field of furniture, by shedding some light about this relevant sector and about the Covet Group as a leading company with a new perspective on business and management. The insight provided throughout the previous pages might be helpful for those looking for a first-hand testimony on this rare example in the Portuguese business scene.

In conclusion, both my master and my internship have succeeded in their objectives, which were to enrich my knowledge in the fields of business, culture and in the corporative environment. I am persuaded that these newly acquired skills will pave the way for a successful professional life.

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Annexes

Annex A – Trainee evaluation

Estudos Interculturais para Negócio
Licenciatura/Mestrado

Estagiário

M^ª Teresa Alves Miranda Valente Garrido

Nome:

Empresa

Covet Group, Lda.

Nome:

Sérgio Bruno da Silva Oliveira

Orientador:

CLASSIFICAÇÃO 1 2 3 4 5

1 - ASSIDUIDADE E PONTUALIDADE

- a - Assiduidade
- b - Pontualidade

			X	
				X

2 - AMBIENTE ORGANIZACIONAL

- a - Adaptação ao meio (desempenho do Estagiário)
- b - Capacidade de integração
- c - Capacidade de iniciativa
- d - Capacidade de investigação técnica
- e - Capacidade de organização
- f - Capacidade de trabalhar em equipa
- g - Utilização de material informático
- h - Aplicação de conhecimentos
- i - _____

				X
			X	
		X		
			X	
				X
			X	
				X
			X	

3 - PLANO DE ESTÁGIO

- a - Progressão durante o estágio
- b - Componente científica
- c - Componente prática
- d - Cumprimento do plano de estágio proposto
- e - Projeto de Intervenção desenvolvido ^(a)
- f - _____

			X	
			X	
				X
			X	
			X	

4 - POSTURA

- a - Aptidão técnico-profissional
- b - Idoneidade ética e deontológica
- c - _____

1	2	3	4	5
			X	
				X

5 - OBSERVAÇÕES A REPORTAR AO ISCAP

Gondomar, 23/05/2019

Assinatura: Sebastião da Silva Oliveira

COVET LDA
COVET LDA
TRAVESSA MARQUES DE SA, N.º 68
4439-324 RIO TINTO
NIF 514 671 467

Annex B – Maison Valentina’s Product Formation Manual

MAISON VALENTINA
LUXURY BATHROOMS

Glossary

Freestanding: a standing alone bathroom sink, without being attached to or supported by something else.

Washbasin: a bathroom sink that is permanently installed and connected to a water supply and drainpipe; where you can wash your hands and face;

Taps: A valve and spout used to regulate delivery of a fluid at the end of a pipe;

Mixer tap: a tap in which hot and cold water supplies have a joint outlet but are controlled separately;

Bathtub: A tub for bathing, especially one installed in a bathroom;

Drainage: the system of water or waste liquids flowing away from a bathtub or sink into the ground or to the wall;

Clic Clac drain: the "clic-clac" waste doesn't involve any kind of lever system and is simply the drainage plug itself, which is operated by pushing it down (sometimes simultaneously turning it) in order to open and close the drainage plug;

Pop up drain: the "pop-up" waste operates the drainage plug by twisting a lever;

S-trap/Siphon: a tube or conduit bent into legs of unequal length, for use in drawing a liquid from one container into another on a lower level by placing the shorter leg into the container above and the longer leg into the one below, the liquid being forced up the shorter leg and into the longer one by the pressure of the atmosphere;

Overflow: an opening that helps prevent flooding by rerouting excess water back to the drain pipe once it reaches a certain level;

Bathtub Overflow Valve: Tube that connects the overflow to the main drainage beneath the bathtub.

MAISON VALENTINA

LUXURY BATHROOMS

Clic Clac drain: the "clic-clac" waste doesn't involve any kind of lever system and is simply the drainage plug itself, which is operated by pushing it down (sometimes simultaneously turning it) in order to open and close the drainage plug;

Pop up drain: the "pop-up" waste operates the drainage plug by twisting a lever;



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LUXURY BATHROOMS

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MAISON VALENTINA

LUXURY BATHROOMS

Categories



BATHTUBS



FREESTANDINGS



WASHBASINS



CASEGOODS



ATO

Appendix A – Internship Diary

04/02/2019

Welcoming and introduction of the company;

Reading of the company and brand manuals;

Online search of 5 architects, interior designers, showrooms and contractors in the UK, Turkey and Latin America.

05/02/2019

Introduction to the brands of the Covet Group, their characteristics and inspiration behind their design choices;

Selection of my favourite pieces, doing a brief summary of the characteristics of each brand and its inspirations;

Giving my opinion regarding the brand website, naming the positive and the negative aspects.

06/02/2019

Selecting 2 pieces and making a brief description of its details, trying to sell the pieces in Portuguese (Diamond bathtub e Petra washbasin);

Introduction to sales concepts, Stakeholder, Opportunities, Pro-form, Lead;

Introduction to the working software and profiling tools used to profile clients (pipl);

Reply to an email of a fictitious client in English in order to practise my selling skills. The reply included information on the pieces selected in the morning:

Corrections and rewriting of the email with the added changes;

Remaking the exercise about the 5 architects, interior designers, showrooms and contractors but this time trying to only select luxury projects or potential clients.

07/02/2019

Selecting 2 pieces and making a brief description of its details (Koi bathtub e Newton freestand);

Fictional situation of a reply to an email of a client, using the price table and discounts to better understand the sales and reply system.

Correction of the email with suggestions given by my colleagues;

Answering the 1st call of a pretend client, discussion about the finishes and taps.

11/02/2019

Reading of the terms and conditions and the FAQ's, clarification of doubts concerning them;

Choosing two pieces for the describing exercise again, (Koi mirror and crochet Washbasin);

Pretend call with a higher difficulty level, reply by email to the fake client;

Identification of my difficulties and provide solutions for them;

Creation of different scenarios on different platforms to introduce the new pieces of Maison Valentina shown at the M&O Paris.

12/02/2019

Finishing the scenarios exercise;

Selecting two pieces (Tortoise washbasin e colosseum floor mirror), provide a description and finishes;

Pretend call with corrections afterwards;

Marketing introduction, getting to know the team, introduction to the strategies for acquiring clients.

13/02/2019

Looking at the blog, inspiration and trends from the Maison Valentina's webpage.

14/02/2019

Introduction to how to write blogs and how to write one for the brand's blog;

Writing of an article for the blog: "Best Italian designers".

18/02/2019

Introduction to the ATO collection, choosing two pieces and making a brief summary of the two;

2 pretend calls concerning the two pieces selected previously, reply email to the fake customers and corrections.

19/02/2019

Research for the report;

Introduction to the MOM platform (Maison & Object and more) and ArchiExpo;

Introduction to extranet, adding products to the MOM platform.

20/02/2019

Adding the missing pieces to the MOM platform and updating the overall brand page on the platform;

Changing the location of Maison Valentina's team desks.

21/02/2019

Continuation of the updated on the MOM platform (Adding pieces, verifying if they already existed there, putting the pieces on the trending page by updating them);

Sending the leads generated by the platform for comparison.

25/02/2019

Daily update of the MOM platform.

26/02/2019

Daily update of the MOM platform.

27/02/2019

Daily update of the MOM platform and the creation of the corporate email.

28/02/2019

Daily update of the MOM platform.

Introduction to Salesforce and contact with the real first client (sending a catalogue by email).

04/03/2019

Reply to clients and updating the Leads;

Cross to already existing Leads;

Daily update of the MOM platform.

05/03/2019

Daily update of the MOM platform.

Replying to clients and doing cross.

06/03/2019

Replying to clients and doing cross.

Daily update of the MOM platform.

07/03/2019

Daily update of the MOM platform.

Replying to clients and doing cross.

11/03/2019

Daily update of the MOM platform.

Replying to clients and doing cross.

12/03/2019

Daily update of the MOM platform.

Replying to clients and doing cross.

13/03/2019

Daily update of the MOM platform;

Replying to clients and doing cross;

Reply to a phone call from a real client.

14/03/2019

Daily update of the MOM platform.

Replying to clients and doing cross.

18/03/2019

Daily update of the MOM platform.

Replying to clients and doing cross;

25/03/2019

Daily update of the MOM platform.

Replying to clients and doing cross;

26/03/2019

Daily update of the MOM platform.

Replying to clients and doing cross;

27/03/2019

Daily update of the MOM platform.

Replying to clients and doing cross;

28/03/2019

Daily update of the MOM platform.

Replying to clients and doing cross;

Online search in an attempt to acquire clients by sending introductory emails of the brand.

01/04/2019

Daily update of the MOM platform.

Replying to clients and doing cross;

Online search in an attempt to acquire clients by sending introductory emails of the brand.

(...)