

THE LEADERSHIP OF SCHOOLS IN THREE REGIONS IN PORTUGAL BASED ON THE FINDINGS OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION

A LIDERANÇA DAS ESCOLAS DE TRÊS REGIÕES PORTUGUESAS VISTA A PARTIR DA AVALIAÇÃO EXTERNA

Helena Quintas

José Alberto Mendonça Gonçalves

ABSTRACT

School leadership has significant effects on the learning, development and academic success of the pupils and on the quality of educational organisations, so, to a large extent, the effectiveness of the school depends upon the way in which leadership is carried out. It is on this basis that we undertook our study which led in this article. In it we sought to characterise the leadership of schools and school clusters in the regions of the Algarve, Alentejo and Lisbon and Tagus Valley, globally and specifically, based on the analysis of the content of external evaluation reports produced by teams from the General Inspectorate of Education during the 2006/2007, 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 academic years. This analysis was carried out as part of the research project FSE/CED/83489/2008 under the responsibility of the Centre for Sociology Research and Studies from the Lisbon University Institute, the University of the Algarve and the Barafunda Association, and we were part of the respective research team. By analysing the data we have been able to establish a joint and per region “profile” of the leaderships in the schools and school clusters that were evaluated, although we consider that their results cannot be extrapolated, given the limits in the wording of the evaluation reports and the fact that these reports were produced by different teams from region to region and even within the regions themselves.

Keywords: “external evaluation of schools”, “external evaluation reports of schools”, “leadership of schools”, “exercising of leadership in schools”.

RESUMO

A liderança escolar tem efeitos significativos na aprendizagem, desenvolvimento e sucesso académico dos alunos e na qualidade das organizações educativas, pelo que das suas práticas depende, em grande medida, a eficácia da acção da escola. Foi tendo estes pressupostos por referentes que desenvolvemos o estudo de que este artigo dá expressão pública. Nele procuramos caracterizar a liderança das escolas e agrupamentos de escolas das regiões do Algarve, Alentejo e Lisboa e Vale do Tejo, em termos globais e específicos, com base na análise de conteúdo efectuada aos relatórios de Avaliação Externa produzidos pelas equipas da Inspeccção-Geral da Educação nos anos lectivos de 2006/2007, 2007/2008 e 2008/2009, análise esta realizada no quadro do projecto de investigação FSE/CED/83489/2008, da responsabilidade do Centro de Investigação e estudos de Sociologia do Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, da Universidade do Algarve e da Associação Barafunda, de que integrámos a respectiva equipa de investigação. A análise dos dados agora efectuada permitiu-nos traçar

um “perfil” de conjunto e por região das lideranças das escolas e agrupamentos de escolas avaliadas, embora consideremos que os seus resultados não possam ser extrapolados, dados os limites da redacção dos relatórios de avaliação e destes serem produzidos por equipas diferentes de região para região e nas próprias regiões.

Palavras-Chave: “avaliação externa das escolas”, “relatórios de avaliação externa das escolas”, “liderança das escolas”, “exercício da liderança nas escolas”.

JEL Classification: I21

1. INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of nursery, primary and secondary education establishments was instituted by Law No. 31/2002 of the 20th of December, and comprises a system which includes two complementary processes: Internal Evaluation and External Evaluation. An experimental phase was undertaken in 2006 and all schools in mainland Portugal are expected to be covered over the course of a four-year cycle.

Internal evaluation is undertaken by the school itself, which should produce “a discourse constituted by judgments that relate variables (a fact or situation that is observed, recorded, learnt about the evaluated subject) to standards (a fact or situation that is seen as an ideal)” (Figari, 1996).

External evaluation, which was assigned to the Inspeção Geral da Educação (IGE - *General Inspectorate of Education*), in collaboration with external experts belonging to higher education establishments, is aimed at: encouraging schools, to systematically question the quality of their practices and their results; coordinating the contributions of external evaluation with the culture and methods of internal evaluation in schools; strengthening the capacity of schools to develop their autonomy; contributing to the regulation of the education system; contributing to a better understanding of schools and of public education, fostering social participation in the life of schools.

Operating on a referential composed of five parameters (results, rendering of educational service, school organisation and management, leadership and capacity for self-regulation and improvement, each broken down into a variable number of factors), the external evaluation teams produce a final report based upon the analysis of documents and panel interviews conducted in schools with a very diverse set of participants, the results of which are returned to the schools evaluated allowing them to define the issues not only that they should improve but that they might want to improve. All areas and factors are examined in a qualitative and descriptive manner. In addition, the areas are given a classification which may range from “Very Good” to “Unsatisfactory”. After the evaluated school has been made aware of the data, the reports are published on the IGE website.

The methodology used allows all the educational participants to be contacted and thus exchange information about their views on the school’s performance in the areas being analysed. However, as the time that each team spent at the educational establishment was limited, with no direct contact with teaching practices and with the almost exclusive use of the interview technique, where the information given must be considered true, the data collected only allows a clearer analysis in certain areas, leaving uncertainty in others. It was also not possible to analyse causal relationships or the contamination between the different areas. This set of circumstances contributed to the random and disperse character of the

external evaluation reports, as not all the indicators were taken into account. It is up to each team of evaluators to integrate those which best describe and characterise the educational unit evaluated.

This study looks at the Leadership that is developed in schools (one of the areas which the External Evaluation focuses on), using the analysis of the External Evaluation reports, and is aimed at understanding how educational organisations put their school vision into practice and how they implement the sharing and flow of information to be able to achieve the set goals and purpose, thereby giving substance to the hierarchical line for the exercising of power.

As a recent project on this subject showed (Leithwood, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2009), school leadership has significant effects on the learning, development and academic success of the pupils and on the quality of the educational organisation.

Our interest in examining this aspect is reinforced because, currently, Portuguese schools are confronted with a new legal framework for their organisation and management, which requires a new paradigm of leadership that determines, among other aspects, the substitution of the Chairman of the Executive Board by a Director. This change is not merely formal, in that it emphasizes the action of leading as opposed to managing, although exercising the role of management includes both. The director has to undertake tasks that are aimed at getting the institution to operate under both general and internal standards and regulations, meaning not only managing, but also influencing the other members of the organisation so that it can improve through this openness to change and innovation, which is what leading means (Ruzafa, 2003). Indeed, both management and leadership are necessary for the dynamics of change and the improvement of the school, and leadership is decisive in mobilising the various participants to resolve the difficult problems faced (Fullan, 2001; English, 2008).

The study focused exclusively on three regions – the Algarve, Alentejo and Lisbon and the Tagus Valley. The reason for this selection was the concern of covering territories with distinct characteristics. The region of the Algarve occupies 5.6% of Portuguese territory and has a population density of 79.1 inhabitants/km². The region of the Alentejo occupies the largest area of the country (30.7%) but it has a much lower population density, 19.6 inhabitants/km², and the overwhelming majority of its parishes are rural (92.3%). As for the Lisbon and Tagus Valley region, it is the most densely populated region at national level (959 inhabitants/km²), exceeding the density of Portugal as a whole (115.4 inhabitants/km²). The majority of its 207 parishes are urban (72%); however, its “rurality” has increased since 2002, when the region of Lezíria do Tejo¹ was incorporated into it. The 3 regions share the general scenario of the country both in terms of the predominance of the population who have completed obligatory schooling (between the 2nd and 3rd cycles of basic education), and of the general increase in the levels of education over time.

In methodological terms, our option to focus on the analysis of the external evaluation reports was a challenging route for the research, since it is based upon records made by evaluation teams from information provided by the schools. The analysis of secondary sources of information provides access to information made from the interpretation of other agents, in this case the evaluation team. If, on the one hand, this condition can be regarded as a limitation in so far as the information is seen through the eyes of the evaluating agents, on the other, they themselves become the object of the analysis. Therefore, we must bear in mind that we are in the presence of a social construction, which, in reality, also happens even when dealing with the primary sources. It is also important to add that our decision to carry out our analysis using the external evaluation reports also allows us to constitute, as the basis for the analysis, documents which, at a first glance, have other objectives.

¹ Source, Instituto Nacional de Estatística (National Institute for Statistics)

The external evaluation of schools has certainly contributed to a reflection on the organisational conditions necessary to promote school success, and this study integrates this purpose.

2. SCHOOL EVALUATION AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 Evaluation

Organisational evaluation in the field of education, which includes the external and internal evaluation of schools, presently occupies a fundamental role in worldwide educational policy agendas.

With the ability of assuming a plurality of formats and a diversity of responses, these evaluation methods differ in the purposes that they pursue and in the players who carry them out. However, there should be a complementarity between both which leads to developments and improvements in the school organisation (Alaiz, 2004; Azevedo, 2002, 2007; McNamara and O'Hara, 2008).

The idea that persists is that the main function of external evaluation is the rendering of accounts, in order to return an overall appraisal of the quality of schools, education and the teaching provided with a view to their improvement. In the words of Janssens and van Amselsvoort (2008) the double function of *accountability* and *improvement*, pertaining to internal evaluation, "is a crucial mechanism for a school to acquire any type of development" (McBeath, 1999, p.40).

The concept of *empowerment* is frequently used to illustrate what is deemed to be the ultimate objective in the evaluation of educational organisations - external and internal evaluation - viewed, in this manner, as complementary processes. This understanding of organisational evaluation reinforces the presupposition of the autonomy that schools have been claiming over the years and, in many countries, evaluation processes respond to this reality, working as instruments of external and internal monitoring of practices which schools develop while exercising their autonomy (Schildkamp, 2007).

Within Europe, especially in countries with a more consolidated experience in the evaluation of schools, such as Scotland, England and the Netherlands, the educational inspection services are responsible for external evaluation. The attribution of this function to these bodies has contributed to the acceptance that the evaluation of schools is an issue for which an external body is responsible and, consequently, has hampered processes which turn evaluation into a task for which the school itself, and those directly involved in it, are responsible (McNamara and O'Hara, 2005).

Experience garnered along the way has shown that changes in both direction and purpose are advisable. The classic role of "monitoring" and "control" which used to characterise the performance of inspection services and contaminate the evaluations that were undertaken, is being substituted by available support methods, such as working together with the schools and the provision of models and tools for self-improvement. The current trend is for external evaluation to take a complementary and supporting role and for internal evaluation to be given priority as a contribution to the school's development. As stated by McBeath and McGlym (2002), it is a model whereby external evaluation focuses, first and foremost, on promoting schools' capacity for internal evaluation.

In Portugal, the processes for evaluating schools are still in their infancy when compared to other European countries. Even though several external school evaluation programmes, projects and procedures have been developed over the last two decades for primary and

secondary schools, both due to initiatives taken by private institutions² and various educational administration bodies (General Inspectorate of Education and Institute for Educational Innovation), educational policy measures pertaining to the evaluation of schools only appeared in 2002 with the publication of a law approving the educational evaluation system, and including both external and internal evaluations, with the latter being compulsory.

The rule of complementarity which, as mentioned above, should characterise these two methods of organisational evaluation, is not yet a reality in Portuguese schools. In the case of internal evaluation, which was not part of the culture and practices of Portuguese schools but which is now required under law, schools found themselves faced with a challenge to which they have been responding in a more or less structured manner. After eight years of schools being obliged to conduct their own evaluations, the scenario today is very atypical and appears more like a practice that is legally required than a need which is perceived and installed in the practices of teachers and the culture of schools.

In the case of external evaluation, the model in force in our country is the responsibility of IGE (General Inspectorate of Education) and was initiated in 2006 by the “Working Group for the Evaluation of Schools”, as it was then known. This was a pilot experiment in which 12 schools were evaluated and was later expanded to all other schools nationwide. It is expected that, by the end of the 2010/2011 academic year, all schools and school clusters will be evaluated.

Corresponding to the requirements of the law, and also to the processes and principles which form the basis of the evaluation of schools that is carried out in other countries and which we have used as our inspiration, the project for external evaluation that is currently being developed is intended to make a significant contribution to the development of schools and the improvement in the quality of student learning, in a perspective of reflection and continuous improvement (IGE, 2010).

The objectives for the external evaluation of schools can be summarised in five main lines of action: a) to promote, in schools, a systematic questioning of the quality of their practices and their results; b) to coordinate the contributions of external evaluation with the culture and devices for internal evaluation in schools; c) to strengthen the capacity of schools to develop their autonomy, d) to contribute to the regulation of the operation of the education system, and e) to contribute to a better understanding of schools and of public education, fostering a social participation in the life of schools.

The external evaluation process operates with an evaluation reference that covers five areas of analysis: Results; Provision of Educational Services; School Organisation and Management; Leadership; Capacity for Self-regulation and School Improvement. Each of these areas includes between two and five factors, with a set of illustrative issues for each one. Each of the five domains that structure the external evaluation is rated on a scale comprising four levels: Very Good, Good, Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory.

External evaluation is conducted by a team of three, comprising two inspectors and an external evaluator from the IGE, most of whom are teachers and researchers in higher education. The methodological principles that led to the establishment of these teams emphasise “the exchanging of ideas in the identification of strategic issues for the improvement of the school and the diversity of experiences” and the “source of enrichment of the work carried out by the IGE” (IGE, 2009, p. 12).

In terms of procedure, the undertaking is based on three steps considered essential for the thorough and detailed knowledge of the educational institution, and also for the

² The Manuel Leão Foundation, created in 1996, responsible for the AVES Programme - Evaluation of Secondary Schools is especially worthy of note. It has been developing its work in the area of school evaluations since the year 2000 and has received financial support from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

feedback, to the school evaluated, of information that will help it implement the necessary improvement processes. These steps include:

- i) The analysis of documents, provided by the school, and which may have been prepared specifically for the external evaluation, such as a document to introduce the school, or already exist within the educational organisation and be of a structuring nature in their course of action;
- ii) School visits, which last for two or three days depending on whether it is a non-clustered school or a cluster of schools. The visit includes a session with a presentation of the school by the executive board, a visit to the facilities and semi-structured panel interviews, covering a wide range of participants, both internal and external, from the educational community: students, parents, teachers, non-teaching staff, local councillors and other school partners;
- iii) The writing up of school/cluster reports, prepared by the external evaluation team. The report is written on the basis of evidence gathered from the main documents of the school, the presentation made by the school itself, and the multiple panel interviews (IGE, 2009) and contains five chapters: Introduction, Characteristics of the School/Cluster, Conclusions of the Evaluation by Parameter, Evaluation by Factor and Final Conclusions. Once the report has been sent, the school evaluated has a period of time in which to respond. The reports and response are published on the IGE's website.

Now that the first round of external evaluations of schools is coming to its conclusion, a provisional report shows that there are two aspects which constitute the core of the entire process. The first has to do with creating a culture of evaluation of schools and its acceptance by the educational community, running the risk, in its absence, of developing an undertaking that does not have significant implications in improving the real and effective quality that is offered by the teaching establishment. As stated by Santos Guerra (2002) "if teachers reject the process, are defensive, behave in an artificial manner, and deny the evidence, then the evaluation will be a waste of time" (p.51). A second aspect relates to the close relationship that should exist between the need to develop this culture of evaluation and a new way of looking at management and strategic planning. The evolution which has been observed in management models of school organisations tends to emphasise the meaningful relationship between the orientation that is given to the educational organisation - its mission, vision and the values that it defends - and the identity of each school. In this context, the evaluation of schools can be seen as a fundamental tool for becoming acquainted with and characterising the educational organisation and identifying its problems, while also allowing appropriate plans of action to be defined and schools to develop, which, undoubtedly, means a determined exercising of leadership.

2.2. Leadership

The leadership of school organisations must be seen as a means for developing an educational and pedagogical action (Costa, 2000), which, in operational terms, means shared management (Sergionanni, 1988, 2004), whose practice and efficacy demand, on the one hand, effectiveness and recognition and, on the other, the use of concerted strategies for action and the promotion of the individual and collective commitment of the entire educational community in carrying out work projects, with a view to resolving difficult problems (Nóvoa, 1992; Fullan, 2001; English, 2008).

To specify the meaning of the concept, given the paradigm shift taking place in Portuguese schools in terms of organisational and operational structures, management and leadership will need to be distinguished, although they are complementary in the exercising of the management function. Therefore, while the manager's action is essentially geared towards running the institution in keeping with general and internal standards (Ruzafa, 2003),

taking on a role that is largely one of control through the budget, the planning of activities and other organisation tools and the regulating of school life, the leader must, above all, set goals for the future, encourage commitments and promote and guide changes (Bolman and Deal, 1994, quoted by Estêvão, 2000). Thus, by exercising leadership, the director must not only focus on the actual work being developed within the school and promote a permanent dialogue and exchange among teachers so that they can discuss their practices and the circumstances in which they are undertaken, with a view to their improvement (Ruzafa, 2003), but also focus on educational provision, the teachers' professional development and the organisational development of the school as a whole (Gairín and Villa, 1999), a process that, according to Bolívar (1997), means a multiple and dynamic exercise of leadership.

This exercising of leadership, which presupposes a set of technical and instrumental skills, and the capacity to instil principles of ethics and evolution, which, in truth are acquired and developed through training and learning (Sanches, 1996; English, 2008), is carried out on the basis of three types of variables (the personal qualities of the leader, the organisation's structure and the school's culture) and is influenced by three aspects: i) legal, the statutory legal or formal framework of the role of the school as an organisation; ii) personal, as a consequence of the personal qualities of the director iii) and functional, which refers to the characteristics of the group and their level of suitability in relation to the aforementioned skills and capacities (Ciscar and Uria, 1986, quoted by Gairín and Villa, 1999).

In fact, the exercising of the leadership of school organisations comprises technical, human, educational, symbolic, cultural and political aspects (Gairín and Villa, 1999), and if it is to be effective, the moral dimension of education, the interpersonal and social nature of educational practices, the instructional dimension and the political nature of education (Alves, 1999) cannot be overlooked. In this context, the director continues to take charge of the day-to-day running of the school, while simultaneously instigating "change and participation", coordinating the actions carried out by various bodies (Fonseca, 2000) and, especially, acting as the "communicator" who anticipates, averts, manages and mediates conflicts, promotes and encourages good relations between the members of the school community and takes proper decisions based on the interests and needs of the school (Fullan, 2001).

Regardless of the different models which, diachronically, have supported the exercising of leadership, from the traditional (mechanistic, bureaucratic, formal and hierarchical), to the democratic and participative, to political, subjective, ambiguous, cooperative and collegial, or even the educational and pedagogical (Costa, 2000; Sanches, 2000; Rocha, 2000), a plurality of practices is involved which, in our opinion, should configure a "transformational" perspective (Burns, 1978) of the school, that means being open to new ideas and tolerant of differences in opinion, seeing weakness as a source of learning, questioning fundamental suppositions, thinking in a prospective and speculative manner, and searching for relations and systematic coherence (Glatter, 2007).

In the Portuguese education system, the regulations defining the bodies and areas of intervention of school leadership form a model where there are shared responsibilities and where the processes of decision making are assumed by the collective bodies (Executive Board/Director, School Board/General Board and Intermediate Leaders). This leads to an internal decentralisation of management, which is exercised and manifested in a dispersed manner, creating multiple leaderships that should work in a coordinated and complementary manner (Ainley and McKenzie, 2000). Therefore, a leadership model based on the principles of collegiality prevails (Sanches, 2000), allowing organisational and pedagogical action of mutual reinforcement and which facilitates individual expression.

This leadership practice is therefore based on a rotation of roles, arising from the possibility of teachers exercising different functions within the educational organisation,

which expands their perception of the reality and allows the identification of one voice and one identity that enables safe and shared management relationships, learning from others and with others, and also the creation of a culture of collaboration, interaction and connection with the community (Beatie, 2002; Gold, Evans, Earley, Halpin, and Callarbone, 2003; Leithwood 1994).

As a logical consequence, the leadership should maximise collaboration and commitment to provide structures and resources which promote dialogue, where all members of the educational community (teachers, students and families) are encouraged to participate in the governance and management of the curriculum. Conditions are thus created whereby multiple voices expressing different ideas can be heard in the processes of change and organisational development (Ross and Gray, 2006; Robertson, 1999).

In short, the leadership action must be creative and innovative, in so far as leading is, without a doubt, a creative process where leaders must be concerned with the creation and re-creation of learning communities which involve the entire democratic life of the educational community (Barker, 2007).

In this process however, we must bear in mind that educational organisations are complex systems whose operations require the collection and circulation of information. The abovementioned systems are open - so information is constantly imported and exported, meaning constant change - and holistic, which presupposes that the parts are not complete in themselves, thereby limiting a cascading management style where top management can control all levels of decision. On the other hand, the respective limits are not easy to determine, making it difficult to capitalise the influence of some participants, such as the parents and other members of the community. In addition, these same limits have tended in the past to give preference to forms of acting and reacting that restrict the planning of change, with the principle of chaos taking the upper hand, which means that interfering in a variable may cause a chain reaction with unpredictable consequences (Coppiers, 2005).

In spite of these restrictions, the circulation of information between teachers on the various aspects of the organisational operation of the school stimulates the actual flow of information and foments change. Additionally, the intensity and quality of the information depend on the level of production of knowledge and the degree of interaction between the structures, and also the culture of communication within the system (Fullan, 2001).

In Portugal, however, the existence, in the same establishment, of teachers with different training backgrounds and who teach different age groups, together with the geographical dispersion that characterises school clusters, may constitute factors which are conducive to barriers that prevent dialogue and hinder the circulation and acquisition of information. This is a situation that requires urgent attention, bearing in mind that, as shown by several studies, regardless of the type of school, the effective use of information proves to be efficacious in identifying expectations and stimulating processes of inquiry and discussion that lead to development (Bert and Gerry, 2005; Coppiers, 2005).

It is therefore vital that those in leadership positions ensure that conditions are in place whereby information about the school is able to circulate.

This means that they must ensure the circulation and quality of information, as well as the variety and diversity of means and forms through which it circulates. They must also ensure the effectiveness of this circulation through a clear system of delegation of responsibilities to ensure that the existing knowledge on indicators of development, progress and school improvement is appropriate to interested parties, namely the educational community.

3. METHODOLOGY

With the study of leadership in clustered and non-clustered Portuguese primary and secondary schools as its purpose, this article presents an independent analysis of data obtained as part of the research project “*Sucesso escolar e perfis organizacionais: um olhar a partir dos relatórios de avaliação externa*” (“*Academic success and organizational profiles: an analysis based on external evaluation reports*”)³. Only data resulting from the analysis of contents of a categorical nature from 293 External Evaluation Reports, drawn up by the General Inspectorate of Education during the academic years 2006/2007, 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 and relating to the regions of the Algarve, Alentejo, and Lisbon and Tagus Valley, was taken into account in our study.

Leadership is one of the five areas considered in the external evaluation of schools (results, provision of educational services, school organisation and management, leadership and the schools’ capacity for self-regulation and improvement). For the purpose of the evaluation, four different factors were analysed: i) vision and strategy; ii) motivation and commitment; iii) openness to innovation and iv) partnerships, protocols and projects, which were assessed in relation to a variable number of referents. However, for this article, we considered only the data concerning the first two factors, which are related to:

- vision and strategy: a) “objectives, goals and strategies”, as defined by the school for the purpose of achieving, in a hierarchical manner, not just the goals it sets itself, but also to solve the problems it encounters; b) “education/training offered and areas of excellence” the former in terms of the criteria of definition, diversification and adaptation to social reality, as well as qualification activities for adults, and the latter according to their internal and external recognition; c) “attractiveness of the school”, meaning the measures that generate demand for it “because of its quality, management, hospitality and professionalism”; and d) “strategic vision and future development”, which can be identified in the guideline documents for the educational management unit;
- motivation and commitment: a) “areas of action, strategies and motivation,” which include not only knowledge of the areas of action by both top management and intermediaries, the definition and implementation of strategies for the improving results and the motivation and commitment of managers in the assumption and performance of their duties; b) “liaison between the bodies” in terms of subsidiarity, complementarity and valorisation of duties and responsibilities and in the mobilisation of the different parties for the fulfilment of established objectives; c) “mobilisation of participants” in terms of their “capacity for information, involvement and recognition”; and d) “monitoring of assiduousness and “critical incidents”, in other words, how the assiduousness of teaching and non-teaching staff is monitored, the strategies used to avoid absenteeism and to lessen its effects, and also the results achieved.

The analysis of the content of the abovementioned reports allowed us to establish five major categories: i) vision; ii) exercising of authority (Executive Board/Director, School Board/General Board and Intermediate Leaders); iii) decision-making processes, iv) sharing and circulation of information and v) openness to innovation.

In this article we will restrict ourselves to the presentation and interpretive analysis of data concerning the vision, the exercising of authority and the sharing and circulation of information, since the main objective we have set ourselves is to characterise the leadership in the three regions under study (the Algarve, Alentejo and Lisbon and Tagus Valley) and, depending on the outcome, reach an understanding as to how educational organisations put

³ Reference: FSE/CED/83498/2008. This project was submitted by the Sociology Research and Studies Centre of the Lisbon University Institute (CIES-IUL), together with the Barafunda Association and University of the Algarve, for the public tender which resulted from the cooperation between the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education/Foundation for Science and Technology and Ministry of Education, to fund research projects on factors and conditions that contribute to promoting academic success and combating drop outs in primary and secondary education.

their vision of the school into practice and how they implement the sharing and circulation of information to achieve their objectives, thereby giving form to the hierarchical line for the exercising of power.

To conclude the methodological characterisation of the research process, of which this article is a short report, it should be noted that the process falls into a humanistic, heuristic and interpretive conception of the research (Erickson, 1986; Patton, 1990; Bogdan and Biklen, 1994; Deshaies, 1997), without neglecting, however, a methodological perspective which integrates the qualitative and the quantitative (Shulman, 1986; Estrela, 1997), in the perspective of “methodological continuum” as understood by Huberman and Miles (1994).

As regards the collection and treatment of data, we can consider two specific situations. Firstly, and within the scope of the research project mentioned at the start of this section, in which we were involved as members of the team of researchers, the aforementioned 293 external evaluation reports were viewed as the analysis *corpus* and were subjected to a content analysis (Bardin, 1979), using the MAXQDA software programme. Thereby, the indicators which typify the evaluation carried out were identified, and in turn were categorised into categories and sub-categories.

Secondly, and acting entirely independently to produce this article, we took the data, organised as already mentioned (but now only pertaining to the three regions of the Algarve, Alentejo and Lisbon and Tagus Valley) and taking into consideration only the subject of leadership (as a field for the analysis of external evaluation) and the categories (exercising of authority, vision, decision-making processes and sharing and circulation of information⁴) and subcategories that it comprises, and set it all out in tables. The tables, which we shall be using as the basis for our interpretative analysis of the data, show the number of reports and their respective percentages by region, the various subcategories, and also the respective sum and percentage value related to the total of the 293 reports.

4. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The analysis of the reports revealed a hierarchical line of the exercising of leadership which we will try to characterise using the data relating to the category “exercising of authority” at its various levels (Executive Board/Director, School Board/General Council and Intermediate Leaders⁵), which comprises different leadership styles, expressed, and at the same time, adapted by the “vision” of the school to which they give shape, through the “decision-making processes” that they implement and through the “sharing and flow of information” that their agents use and promote.

4.1. Exercising of authority

Below is an interpretive analysis of the data relating to the hierarchical exercising of authority by the school, which consolidates the respective leadership.

4.1.1. Executive Board/Director

In the external evaluation reports, the leadership of the Executive Board/Director of the school is characterised according to different perspectives whose analysis yielded the following parameters: Leadership Style, Definition (or Non-definition) of Procedures, Type of Management (Strategic or Non-strategic) and Capacity to Mobilise other agencies and the school community (Table 1), which we shall now analyse.

⁴ The analysis of the content of the external evaluation reports allowed us to establish five major categories - the four indicated plus “openness to innovation” which we did not consider in this article.

⁵ The Administration and Management regime of schools was changed over the three school years in which the reports analysed were prepared. Therefore, some of them relate to situations under the previous Administration and Management regime, while others relate to the current one, which is why we have considered the designations Executive Board/Director and School Board/General Council, to cover both situations.

Table 1. Executive Board, by region

	Algarve		Alentejo		Lisbon and Tagus Valley		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Executive Board								
Leadership Style								
Active/Committed/Strong	3	7.32	4	7.02	29	14.87	36	12.29
Openness and Availability								
Educational Action	22	53.66	14	24.56	53	27.18	89	30.38
Relational/Emotional	11	26.83	14	24.56	67	34.36	92	31.40
Negative Relational/Emotional	1	2.44	0	0.00	2	1.03	3	1.02
Centralised Leadership	1	2.44	2	3.51	11	5.64	14	4.78
Others	3	7.32	1	1.75	9	4.62	13	4.44
Definition/Non-definition of Procedures								
Non-definition	4	9.76	7	12.28	50	25.64	61	20.82
Definition	5	12.20	14	24.56	50	25.64	69	23.55
Type of Management	0	0.00	1	1.75	0	0.00	1	0.34
Non-strategic Management	4	9.76	10	17.54	25	12.82	39	13.31
Strategic Management	9	21.95	23	40.35	65	33.33	97	33.11
Capacity to Mobilise/Sharing of Vision								
Weak Capacity to Mobilise	4	9.76	3	5.26	13	6.67	20	6.83
Sharing of Vision/Mobilising Action	3	7.32	6	10.53	40	20.51	49	16.72

Taking all three regions into account and, in accordance with the data, the leadership of school Executive Boards/Directors is characterised overall by the exercising of an authority that is expressed mainly: i) by “Openness and Availability”, meaning a commitment as regards the “Relational/Emotional” parameter identified in 92 reports (31.40% of the total 293), and the “Educational Action” parameter (89 reports, or 30.38%); and ii) by the implementation of a management process, which varies between “Definition” (69 reports, meaning 23.55% of the total) and “Non-definition” (61 reports, or 20.82%), and whose nature is essentially strategic (as mentioned in 98 reports, representing 33.11% of the respective total), although it was also considered as non-strategic in 39 reports (13.31%). Also showing traits which are characteristic of the exercising of authority by the Executive Boards/Directors of the school, but with less relative weighting, we can refer to the sharing of the school vision, in the sense of mobilising other educational partners (16.72%, corresponding to 49 reports) as well as the leadership being “Active/Committed/Strong” (12.29%).

If we focus our analysis on the regions, one by one, we can see that, in the Algarve, the leadership of the schools evaluated, during the time period considered, has, as its main characterising traits, a concern for Educational Action (22 reports, or 53.66% of the respective total) and the establishment of a relational/emotional environment with the other educational agents (26.83% of the total reports), while assuming a nature with a strategic trend (9 reports, or 21.95%). In procedural terms, although there is a trend towards a leadership with defined procedures (12.20%, which corresponds to 5 reports) it is not particularly assertive since reference to the non-definition of procedures was found in almost the same number of reports (4, meaning 9.76% of the respective total). Pertaining to other factors that, according to the content of the external evaluation reports, define the character for the exercising of leadership of the Executive Boards/Directors of schools in the Algarve, the data reveals almost residual values, among which we would highlight the Capacity to Mobilise/Share the Vision, which varies from being weak (in 9.76% of reports from the region) to manifesting itself as Mobilising Action (in 3 reports, or 7.32%).

As for the Alentejo region, the level of exercising of leadership which we considered is also characterised, although less emphatically in numerical terms, by Openness and

Availability, on an equal footing with the Relational/Emotional and Educational Action parameters (14 reports, or 30.38% in both cases), and by a process of a more affirmatively strategic management (23 reports, meaning 40.35% of the respective total, against 17.54%, corresponding to 10 reports that relate to a non-strategic management). Likewise, the following parameters are also significant in the characterisation of the leadership of the schools in this region: an action characterised more by the Definition of Procedures (seen in 14 reports, or 24.56% whereas Non-definition is present in 7 or 12.28%) and by the Sharing of Vision/Mobilising Action of the various educational agents (mentioned in 6 reports, or 10.53% of the total, against 5.26%).

Pertaining to the Lisbon and Tagus Valley region, the leadership of the respective Executive Boards/Directors is characterized mainly by a commitment to Educational Action (67 reports, which represent 34.36% of the total) and by the fact of being Relational/Emotional (53 reports, or 27.18%); by the manifestation of a practice that varies, in parity, between the Definition and Non-definition of Procedures (50 reports, or 25.64% in both cases); by being strategic (65 reports, representing 33.33% of the respective total, while being considered as non-strategic in 25 reports, or 12.82%); by its concern in sharing its vision of the school and being a mobiliser (an aspect contained in 40 reports, or in 20.51% of the total); and by the fact of being Active/Committed/Strong (29 reports, or 14.87%), a trait which is numerically significant when compared with the results of the other two regions for the same parameters.

In summary, we can state that the exercising of leadership by the Executive Boards/Directors of the schools tends to be stronger in the Lisbon and Tagus Valley region, while in the Alentejo and Algarve, it is more diffuse in character. In general, the three regions have the same dominant characteristic which is reflected in an open and available leadership with regard to Educational Action, is firmly founded on its Relational/Emotional aspect, has a strategic tendency and shows some concern for the mobilisation of the different educational agents and community for a concerted action.

4.1.2. School Board/General Council

The analysis of the content of the reports concluded that the exercising of authority of the School Board/General Council was considered on two levels: the level pertaining to the relationship with the Executive Board/Director and that of the functions of the School Board itself or the General Council. This data is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. School Board/General Council, by Region

	Algarve		Alentejo		Lisbon and Tagus Valley		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
School Board/General Council								
Relationship with EB	12	29.27	4	7.02	9	4.62	25	8.53
Role of the School Board/General Council								
Absent	1	2.44	1	1.75	3	1.54	5	1.71
Formal	5	12.20	10	17.54	16	8.21	31	10.58
Participative	11	26.83	16	28.07	42	21.54	69	23.55
Members	3	7.32	0	0.00	16	8.21	19	6.48

The reference to the relationship of the School Board/General Council with the Executive Board/Director was only found, for the three regions, in 25 reports (8.53% of a total of 293), which would appear to suggest a certain distance, or at least, a lack of complementarity, between the two main leadership bodies of the educational institutions.

On the other hand, the functions of the School Board/General Council will be defined, according to the contents of the reports analysed, mainly as participative (69 reports, or 23.55% of the total). It is also significant that, according to 31 reports (10.58%), they were considered formal, and, according to the other 5 reports (1.71%), absent. There are also cases in which the image of this body's action can be seen as the action of some of its members, which is the case in 19 reports, representing 6.48% of the total.

Now looking at the analysis of the data by region, we can see that, in the Algarve, the relationship of the School Board/General Councils with the Executive Board/Director is mentioned in 12 reports (29.27% of the total), with this being the highest value of references, in this parameter, in relation to the three regions. Regarding the functions of the School Boards/General Councils, the pattern shown by the analysis of data related to all three regions remains, although, in this case, with higher specific percentages. Therefore, the main characterising trait continues to be the one defining the function as participative, now with a percentage value of 26.83% (11 reports from the total), while 5 reports (12.20%) refer to it as being absent, and 1 (2.44%) as being formal. The focus on members of the different bodies now corresponds to 3 reports, or 7.32% of the respective total.

Pertaining to the Alentejo region, the relationship between the Executive Board/Director and the School Boards/General Councils has a percentage value lower than the overall, only 7.02% (4 reports from the specific total). The function of the body in question is once again seen as being mainly participative, a characterising trait that emerged from the analysis of 16 reports (28.07% of the total, the highest percentage in this parameter in the three regions) and we cannot fail to mention that it was also considered as formal in 10 reports (17.54%), and absent in 1 report (1.75%). The demonstration of the role or actions of the body's (or bodies') members did not exist in this case.

Lastly, pertaining to the Lisbon and Tagus Valley region, we can affirm, in light of the data, that the relationship of the School Boards/General Councils with the Executive Boards/Directors is expressed in 9 reports, 4.62% of the total, which is the lowest figure in this parameter for all the three regions. As for the function of the School Boards/General Councils, the pattern follows that of the other two regions, but in this case, its numerical values are lower in all parameters. Therefore, it continues to be characterised as primarily participative (42 reports, or 21.54% of the total), while also being regarded as formal (16 reports, meaning 8.21%) and absent (in 3 reports, or 1.54% of the respective total). The focus given to some of its members is, now, present in 9 reports, which represents 4.62% of the specific total.

Generically, we can say that, as a result of the analysis carried out, the participation of School Boards/General Councils in the exercising of authority or leadership, ranges from participative to formal, although leaning more towards the former, in the three regions whose external evaluation reports were analysed.

4.1.3. Intermediate leadership

Intermediate leadership is described in the reports in terms of the quality of liaison between the structures, the form of participation in the management of the school, and the level of recognition and integration in the school organisation and the limits of its performance, aspects which, in the analysis, were globally considered as defining for the "hierarchical line" of the exercising of power pertaining to this level of leadership in schools (Table 3).

Table 3. Intermediate Leadership, by Region

	Algarve		Alentejo		Lisbon and Tagus Valley		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Hierarchical Line/Intermediate Leadership								
Liaison between Structures								
Good Liaison	5	12.20	15	26.32	76	38.97	96	32.76
Limited	2	4.88	7	12.28	9	4.62	18	6.14
Submission to EB	1	2.44	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.34
Forms of Participation								
Management of the Pedagogical Service	5	12.20	3	5.26	11	5.64	19	6.48
Mobilisation and Co-responsibility	0	0.00	2	3.51	11	5.64	13	4.44
Monitoring of the Educational Action	3	7.32	2	3.51	10	5.13	15	5.12
Others	0	0.00	1	1.75	3	1.54	4	1.37
Recognition and Integration	17	41.46	14	24.56	58	29.74	89	30.38
Limit of Performance	14	34.15	6	10.53	40	20.51	60	20.48

Considering the overall data, for all the three regions, we can see that liaison between the structures is characterised as good in 96 reports, representing 32.76% of the total of 293, and that it is the highest percentage of all the parameters comprising this category of analysis. However, it should be noted that, in 18 reports (6.14%), liaison is reported as being limited, which must be taken into consideration. It is also worth noting that in only 1 report (0.34%) the intermediate structures are considered to be in submission to the Executive Board/Director. Interpreting this data, as a whole, it can be said that in schools and clusters whose reports were analysed, the intermediate leaders exercise their action in a relatively autonomous manner and, undoubtedly, complementarily to all other bodies of the respective institutions. This interpretation seems to be reinforced when 89 reports (30.38% of the total), affirm the recognition and integration of the intermediate structures in the exercising of leadership, although this is mitigated by the fact that 60 reports (20.48%) acknowledge limitations in performance. This relativity also seems to make more sense when we look at the low percentages in the different forms of participation of the intermediate leaders, whose values range from 6.48% (19 reports) to 1.37% (4 reports). Standing out among these forms of participation, however, are those that refer to the management of the pedagogical service (19 reports, or 6.48%), to the monitoring of educational actions (15 reports, or 5.12% of the total of 293) and to mobilisation and co-responsibility (13 reports, or 4.44%).

We shall now move on to analyse the data given in Table 3, looking at each region individually. Starting with the Algarve, we can see that liaison between the structures is considered good in 5 reports (12.20% of the respective total) – the lowest value for this parameter in the three regions - and as limited in 2 (4.88%), this being the region where we find the reference to submission to the Executive Board/Director (1 report, or 2.44%), which we have already mentioned. In turn, this is the region which has the highest numerical value out of the three (17 reports, 41.46%) as regards the recognition and integration of intermediate leadership, which seems contradictory in relation to the data just given, but makes more sense when we look at the references to the limits in the performance of the leadership in question, which show the highest percentage value from each of the regions (14 reports, 34.15%). Pertaining to the forms of participation of the intermediate leadership and, once again, somewhat contradictorily, we can see that, if on the one hand, the importance shown by their recognition and integration appears to be visible, in so far as the management of pedagogical services is present in 5 reports (12.20%) and the monitoring of educational

action in 3 (7.32%) - values greater than those found in the other two regions -, on the other, the mobilisation and co-responsibility of the intermediate leadership is completely omitted.

Pertaining to the region of the Alentejo, liaison between the structures is considered good in 15 reports, 26.32% of the respective total (this figure being the second highest in this parameter in the three regions), and limited in 7 reports, or 12.28%, which is the highest figure for the parameter, also in the three regions. The recognition and integration of the intermediate leadership was, in this case, identified in 14 reports, 24.56% of the total, while the limits of its performance were identified in 6 reports, or 10.53%, which constitute, respectively, the lowest and highest value, of one and another of these parameters in the three regions. Pertaining to the forms of participation of the intermediate leadership, they are even less representative, in numerical terms - management of the pedagogical service, 5.26% (3 reports), and monitoring of educational action, 3.51% (2 reports) - as those from the Algarve, except with regard to monitoring and co-responsibility (2 reports or 3.51% of the respective total).

Where the Lisbon and Tagus Valley region is concerned, liaison between the structures shows the highest percentage value of the three regions (76 reports or 38.97% of the respective total), whereas it was characterised as limited in 9 reports (4.62%). As was the case with the reports from the schools in the Alentejo region, there was no mention of submission to the Executive Board/Director. Continuing with the analysis, we can see that the recognition and integration of the intermediate leadership is expressed in 58 reports, representing 29.74% of the total, a figure which is lower than the one for the same parameter in the region of the Algarve, but greater than in the Alentejo, while the limits on their performance, mentioned in 40 reports (20.51%), are numerically less significant than those in the Algarve and almost double those in the region of the Alentejo. Lastly, the figures for the factors that define the ways in which the intermediate leadership participates are similar, as the management of the pedagogical service and mobilisation and co-responsibility are considered to be on an equal footing, both being present in 11 reports (5.64%), while the monitoring of educational action is present in 10 (5.13% of the total).

In summary, we can apparently state that the exercising of authority by the intermediate structures is defined, primarily, and in descending order of the relative weight of the respective factors, in the regions of Lisbon and the Tagus Valley, Alentejo and Algarve, by good liaison between them, although the schools in the Algarve lead the way where the recognition and integration of the intermediate leadership and the respective limits of performance are concerned, being followed by the region of Lisbon and the Tagus Valley and lastly, by the Alentejo. With regard to the forms of participation, the pattern is identical in all three regions, although with some numerical variation. In addition, the absence of references to mobilisation and co-responsibility of intermediate leadership in reports from the region of the Algarve should be noted.

4.2. Vision

In the reports analysed, the “vision” comprises the objectives, goals and strategies that are defined by the school or cluster, namely by the priority areas of intervention and the strategies used to achieve them, the educational offer that is available, considered adequate to the social reality in which the school is integrated, and also by the strategic vision for future development (prospective vision/future/opportunities) (Table 4).

Table 4. Vision, by Region

	Algarve		Alentejo		Lisbon and Tagus Valley		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Vision								
Objectives, Goals and Strategies								
Areas of Priority Intervention	7	17.07	17	29.82	45	23.08	69	23.55
Strategies	0	0.00	2	3.51	5	2.56	7	2.39
Educational offer	16	39.02	39	68.42	102	52.31	157	53.58
Prospective Vision/Future/Opportunities	4	9.76	18	31.58	63	32.31	85	29.01

The data collected for the three regions allows us to conclude that, to achieve the objectives, goals and strategies that are proposed, the schools are tending to commit to the identification of areas of priority intervention. The existence of 69 reports that mention this, out of 293, is instructive for a practice that seems usual. However, unexpectedly, only 7 reports, which represent the small percentage of 2.39%, identify strategies that are implemented and that will contribute to achieving the objective that schools have set themselves. The results seem to suggest that there is no corresponding strategic action that responds, operationally, to the implementation of what was considered as a priority area of intervention. The availability of a diversified offer of education is the most illustrative purpose of the vision of the schools evaluated. In 157 of the reports analysed, which corresponds to a percentage of 53.58%, mention is made of the large and diverse response, in terms of courses or alternative educational responses, which will address the requirements of various audiences with different educational needs. As for the prospective vision, 85 reports allude to it (32.31% of the total analysed), which shows some limitation in the ability to envision a possible development and to give an appropriate response. Globally speaking, we can conclude that the vision of the schools analysed is characterized by an intentionality that relies on intervention areas identified as priority, which in operational terms means the abundant provision of a rich and diverse educational offer, although reference to strategies that make this possible is very scarce. Pertaining to the capacity of leadership to look to the future and to organise a suitable response, the results moderately reflect this possibility.

Next we will take a more specific look at these characteristics or trends for each of the three regions.

In line with the general trend, in school organisations in the Algarve priority is also given to the educational offer (16 reports, or 39.02%), with the definition of areas of intervention (7 reports, which represent 17.07 % of the respective total) coming second. As the third most mentioned subcategory, we have the prospective vision and future opportunities (4 reports, or 9.76%) and, somewhat strangely, no report referred to strategies for leadership actions. If, as we have seen, the strategic dimension is very small for the regions in general, in the case of the Algarve, it is non-existent.

Pertaining to the reports from the Alentejo region, the educational offer is also prominently mentioned (in 39 reports, or 68.42% of the respective total) but, contrary to the trend seen for the Algarve, in second place we have the prospective vision (in 18 reports, or 31.58%), and only afterwards do we have the defining of areas of intervention (17 reports which represent 29.82% of the respective total). The strategies for implementing the school's vision are only covered in 2 reports (3.51%) from those produced in this region.

With regards to the Lisbon and Tagus Valley region, the management bodies' vision of their schools is mainly reflected, as in the overall trend, in the educational offer. This was mentioned in 102 reports, or 52.31% of the respective total, followed by their prospective vision and the awareness of opportunities to be put into practice in the future, according

to the contents of 63 reports (32.31% of the total), and the definition of priority areas of intervention, an aspect contained in 45 reports or 23.08% of the total. Lastly, it should be noted that strategies to give substance to the vision of the school were found in only 5 reports, corresponding to 2.56% of the total in this region.

To conclude, where this category is concerned, the differences between the three regions in question are subtle and match the profiles that characterise the generality of the reports analysed. In the Algarve, Alentejo and the Lisbon and Tagus Valley region, schools recognise the areas in which they should invest, but the strategic intent that would ensure the capitalisation of this investment is very weak, and the huge commitment to the educational and training offer does not appear to have arisen from a conscious capacity to anticipate the future. Therefore, the form of leadership which prevails is one whose nature is procedural rather than intentional.

4.3. Decision-making processes

With regards to the decision-making processes, the reference framework for the external evaluation calls for the collection of evidence on how the participants are involved and also about the processes that are mobilised by the leadership structures to pursue the goals that the schools and clusters have set themselves. As a result, excerpts compiled in reports refer mainly to the involvement in the decision-making process, and more specifically to the logic of the chain of action, that successively transfers, to distinct levels, the responsibility to comply with what is established in the structuring documents of the school or cluster. In the set of illustrative questions that external evaluation teams put to the panels interviewed, questions arise regarding the hierarchy and scheduling of the school or cluster's objectives, and as to how management promotes liaison between the bodies, to recognise, both the principle of subsidiarity and the valorisation of the complementarity which arises from the nature of the duties and responsibilities. The participants are also asked about the incentives given to them to make decisions and to take responsibility for them.

The scarcity of reports that address these issues, expressed in Table 5, which shows that in a universe of 293 reports only 64 spoke of decision-making processes (21.84% of the total), shows that the evaluators did not find much evidence of leadership actions in this field. However, the most remarkable characteristic of this category was the impossibility of listing distinct angles of appreciation for this area in the *corpus* analysed and which would have allowed for the creation of sub-categories.

Table 5. Decision-making Processes, by Region

	Algarve		Alentejo		Lisbon and Tagus Valley		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Decision-making Processes	5	12.20	17	29.82	42	21.54	64	21.84

The descriptive analysis, by region, uncovered some discrepancies in the decision-making processes that are evident in the reports from the Algarve, Alentejo and Lisbon and Tagus Valley.

In the region of the Algarve, only five reports mention the decision-making processes (12.20%), in the Alentejo the number of reports and their percentage is much higher (17 reports corresponding to a percentage of 29.82%) and finally, in the Lisbon and Tagus Valley region, references to this category of analysis were found in 42 reports (21.54%). We could not find any explanation for this inequality other than the choice that must have been made

by the external evaluation teams involved in the respective schools as to what to include in their reports. In fact, the results that this study reached do not allow us to draw conclusions that go beyond the limited scope of the contents of the school and cluster external evaluation reports which, being a secondary source of information, represent a subjective view of an observed reality. The contents of the reports are the result of evidence gathered from various sources, and there are restrictions and constraints in their wording, such as space limitations, but also inherent to the fact that different teams carried out the external evaluation in each region. It is likely that these circumstances dictated choices on the content to be included in the reports that, which in the case of the decision-making processes, may have contributed to a different valorisation between the regions.

4.4. Sharing and Use/Flow of Information

This category refers to communication, involvement and recognition of the participants in the educational sphere. Globally speaking, the sharing, use/flow of information is expressed predominantly in terms of the flow of information between the school and the community, mentioned in 112 of the 293 reports analysed (38.23% of the total), of the flow of internal information (21 reports, or 7.17%), and other aspects, namely difficulties and weaknesses that hinder a more effective flow of information (in 19 reports, 6.48% of the total) (Table 6).

Table 6. Sharing, Use/Flow of Information, by Region

	Algarve		Alentejo		Lisbon and Tagus Valley		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Use/Flow of Information								
School/Community	14	34.15	24	42.11	74	37.95	112	38.23
Internal Communication	7	17.07	4	7.02	10	5.13	21	7.17
Negative Aspects	10	24.39	3	5.26	6	3.08	19	6.48

In a general assessment of these results, there are two areas that deserve some comments: i) the valorisation given by the external evaluation to the processes for communicating information that schools establish with the surrounding community; and ii) the scant reference in the reports of text referring to the internal flow of information. If, on the one hand, it is interesting and positive to know there is very significant liaison and contact between the school and community (though the contents, objectives and consequences of the passing of information is not detailed), on the other it was not expected that there would so little reference to internal circulation. The causes of this weakness in the content of reports eludes the analysis carried out and, among other explanations that could be given, we can assume that the acceptance of the informality, which normally characterises the circuits for the passing of information in schools, has trivialised its existence to the point that no emphasis is given in the reports produced. We can therefore infer that the teams evaluating the internal communication processes did not consider them particularly worthy of note. This finding is worrying, especially when we are dealing with very complex organisations, such as schools and clusters where decisions are taken on different levels, each corresponding to distinct but complementary levels of leadership. As we see it, the scant reference to the processes which sustain a transfer of information that orientates the pursuit of what should be common goals undermines a leadership which, although shared, should be integrated into collective purposes.

Another point worth noting, and which returned significant figures in the results reported, relates to the difficulties and weaknesses in the processes for the circulation of information.

In this context, what is highlighted in the reports are, mainly, the failings arising from the difficulties encountered by participants in the use of technological resources. It seems that the existence of resources is not enough for the flow of information to be triggered and, in this case, the potential that technology provides does not guarantee that the information disclosed is appropriate to the recipients.

Having assessed the results by region, we can see that, in the Algarve, the school/community relationship is mentioned in 14 reports (34.15% of the total in the region), the negative aspects emerge as the second most mentioned subcategory (10 reports, corresponding to 24.39%) and, following the trend of the overall results in this category, the internal communication processes are least mentioned, present only in 7 of the reports from the region (17.07%). In the Alentejo, the subcategory that is most referred to continues to be the school/community relationship (present in 24 reports, which corresponds to a percentage of 42.11%), but contrary to what is observed in the Algarve, negative aspects are only reported in 3 reports from the region, which corresponds to 5.26%. Internal communication too is insignificant, given that it only appears in 4 reports which represent 7.02% of the total. Taking a predominantly rural territorial typology, where the dispersion of schools that comprise the same group can affect the communication processes between the different education participants, as the basis of the analysis of this region, we did expect the reports to reflect this reality. The aforementioned informality that characterises internal communication within school organisations and which, in many cases, consists of a “conversation” between teachers, is not compatible when distance is a barrier that prevents people from meeting. It is up to the leaders to overcome this constraint, possibly instigating informal processes for communicating information based on the use of technology.

In the region of Lisbon and Tagus Valley, the School/Community Relationship follows the general pattern, emerging as the subcategory most referred to (74 reports, 37.95%), and very low figures are shown in the reports for both Internal Communication and Negative Aspects (respectively, in 10 and 6 reports, corresponding to 5.13% and 3.08%). The most relevant aspect in the Lisbon and Tagus Valley region, and which distinguishes it from the others, is the high percentage difference between the School/Community Relationship and the other subcategories, in contrast to the much more balanced figures in the Algarve and the Alentejo.

Generically speaking, we can state that in all three regions the flow of information to the community is well achieved, but the same cannot be said for the internal processes. This data can only be seen as troubling. It is known that the internal circulation of information, both by establishing interaction among teachers, and by providing information about problems that can be communicated, such as student performance, is essential in promoting academic success. The signalling, which is common to all three regions, of negative aspects that, as we have seen, refer to difficulties and weaknesses that limit a more effective flow of information, may be an indication that schools are aware of the consequences of the difficulties identified in internal communication.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, and according to the data just analysed (based on an analysis of the content of the 293 External Evaluation reports drawn up in the 2006/2007, 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 academic years in school and clusters in the regions of the Algarve, Alentejo and Lisbon and Tagus Valley) we can say that the leadership in the various schools share some of the characteristics that define the concept of school leadership, and which we have sought to delineate in point one of this article. Others, however, are absent or, at least, are

not mentioned in the reports. This may be because they were not subject to analysis during the evaluation process or because they were not detected either in the documents analysed by the External Evaluation Teams or in their visits to the schools.

Let us focus then on the “model” of leadership in Portuguese schools that, globally speaking, has to be seen in reference to the legal standards in force, which, rather than taking a traditional centralist view of the management of schools, envisage a sharing of vision and objectives, of the effective circulation of information, of responsibilities and the decision-making processes, which, as we have seen, give rise to multiple leaderships that, in order to be effective, must operate, as stated by Ainley and McKenzie (2000), in a coordinated and complementary manner. This mode of operation is reflected in what Sergiovanni (2004) calls shared management, which is exercised, in particular, at three levels: Executive Board/Director, School Board/General Council and Intermediate Leadership, especially the Pedagogical Board, Departments, Class Councils and Class/Registration Teachers.

Our goal for this article being to characterise leadership at these three levels, without losing sight of the whole, let us see how closely or distantly it resembles the standard model(s), both for all three regions jointly, and also in relation to each one individually.

In this sense, a first observation is that the Executive Board/Director has a decisive role, both through their duties and by their practice, in the exercising of leadership, its relationship with the School Board/General Council being limited, while the latter’s action is not very visible, even though they are the real principle body for the operation and regulation of an educational organisation. On the other hand, in terms of Intermediate Leadership, the hierarchical line for the exercising of leadership unclear and even seems to lack assertiveness.

If we confine ourselves, in a specific manner, to each of the three levels mentioned, we can, in short, characterise them as follows:

- Executive Board/Director - exerts a weakly centred and not very active/committed/strong leadership, revealing as their most striking characteristic traits their openness and availability as regards the manner in which they relate to other education agents, characterised by the establishment of interpersonal relationships (that are inducers of a practice of democratic leadership (Alves, 1999), their concern for the educational activity, a moderate tendency to define procedures and an also not particularly significant ability to share the vision/take mobilising action;
- School Board/General Council - seen, according to the data, as taking a participative attitude, but with a non-negligible penchant for formality, and functioning in a secondary role in the exercising of leadership. Their relationship with the Executive Board/Director is not very effective, which could mean a weak complementarity of action between the two;
- Intermediate Leadership - although the data shows that they are recognised and integrated into the leadership process and have a good relationship with the Executive Board/Director, whilst nevertheless being somewhat limited in their actions, the figures suggest little involvement in the exercising of authority and leadership.

Following on from the characterisation of the leadership of the schools mentioned above, let us now briefly focus on the vision of the school, on the decision-making processes and the flow of information (aspects which are relevant to all three levels of leadership we have been considering) that contribute to the exercising of leadership, on the one hand resulting from it, and, on the other, constituting a shaping factor.

Pertaining to vision, the central concern of leadership is clearly focused on the educational offer, something which, according to Gairín and Villa (1999), is crucial to the development of an educational and pedagogical leadership, leaving in the background, not only the vision for the future/opportunities of the school, whose definition, as we have shown, and according to Bolman and Deal (1994, quoted by Estêvão, 2000) is fundamental to the exercising of

an effective leadership, but also the setting of priorities for intervention. Additionally, and paradoxically, the strategic dimension of implementing the vision of the school is practically absent in the reports, from which one may infer a certain sense that management is more procedural than truly prospective, and more reactive than active, thereby not giving shape, at least in an obvious manner, to the promotion of concerted action strategies, which, as we have already mentioned, Nóvoa (1992) advocates as promoting the individual and collective commitment of different education agents towards the development of the school.

Regarding the decision-making processes, the content of this field of analysis refers to the relationship between governing bodies, to the complementarity of roles and responsibilities and, consequently, the mobilisation of leadership bodies to achieve the goals set, in line with what is advocated by Leithwood *et al.* (2009), meaning in the sense of attaining the collective commitment of the school community to achieve the defined objectives (Glass, 2000).

In turn, the use/flow of information is characterised by an accentuated valorisation of the interactions that the schools establish with the surrounding community, to the detriment of the internal flow of information. While the former is undeniably important, this situation is unsuited to the spirit of permanency and efficiency of the communication process which should characterise the leadership and which should occur in a more efficient and structured manner (Fullan, 2001). The acknowledged informality which characterises the circuits for the flow of information within the educational organisations may explain the results obtained. Other relevant data refers to the identification of the constraints that the schools face which are more frequent in clustered schools.

Looking now at each of the regions considered, and on the basis of the data analysed, it is fair to state that the exercising of leadership by the different bodies in the schools and school clusters is, generally speaking as would be expected, globally identical to the group “profile” that we have been outlining, although, logically, with variations in some aspects.

Pertaining to the region of the Algarve, it is important to mention that the central concern in the exercising of authority by the Executive Boards/Directors, as revealed by the analysis of the reports, relates to educational action. Other characterising traits are the relational/emotional dimension with other educational partners, the concern of putting into practice a strategic type of management, and, less significantly in terms of numerical weight, the definition of action procedures. The relationship of the Executive Board/Directors with the School Board/General Council can be considered as moderate, but much more representative than in the other two regions, while the role of these bodies is largely participative, even if only with a moderate percentage. In turn, the exercising of authority by the Intermediate Leadership, in the schools evaluated in the region of the Algarve, is mainly defined by three factors: its recognition and integration and, with very similar figures, the limitations on their performance, which considerably plays down the first aspect, and a rather insignificant affirmation of the good liaison between the structures. Next, we must draw attention to the fact that the different leaderships express their vision of the school mostly in terms of its educational offer and the definition of priority areas of intervention, although less significantly in both cases than in the other two regions. The weighting of the decision-making processes is also lower in percentage terms than in the schools and clusters in the Alentejo and Lisbon and Tagus Valley regions, while the use/flow of information is mainly aimed at the community (despite being less significant in percentage terms than in the Lisbon and Tagus Valley region, and, most of all, in the Alentejo). Further, the figures relating to the negative aspects of this factor are considerably higher than in the other two regions, while the exact opposite is shown with regard to the percentage value for internal communication.

As for the leaderships of schools and school clusters in the Alentejo region, their main characteristic now is the development of an essentially strategic management and, on an

equal footing, their focus on educational activities, the establishment of an emotional/relational environment and the definition of action procedures. Their relationship with the School Board/Council General is very weak, varying between being participative and formal, with the latter, however, being more marked than it is in schools and school clusters in the Algarve. In this region, the participation of Intermediate Leadership in the exercising of authority is mainly defined by two aspects: good liaison between the structures, although the figures are low, and the recognition and integration of these structures in the overall leadership process. The figures relating to the school vision shared by the different levels of leadership are higher than those for all the same factors in the two other regions, except with regards to the prospective/future/opportunities parameter, where is much higher than in the Algarve but slightly lower than Lisbon and the Tagus Valley. Therefore, the vision of the school is characterised by the educational offering, the perspective of the future, the definition of priority areas of intervention and by a somewhat timid (but still more pronounced than in the other regions) concern on the part of the leadership structures for a strategic decision for action. The decision-making processes in schools evaluated in the Alentejo stand out in relation to the other two regions, with the same being true as regards the use of information in relating to the community, where the percentage is higher than the figures for Lisbon and the Tagus Valley and the Algarve. Here too, the internal circulation of information is extremely poor.

Lastly, looking at the schools in the region of Lisbon and the Tagus Valley, the data analysed allows us to state that action of their Executive Boards/Directors focuses primarily on the establishment of positive emotional relationships with the educational community (parameter with the highest percentage in the three regions) and, secondly, on their concern with educational action, an action that tends to be strategic, and varies, in parity, between definition and non-definition of procedures, although this body does strive to mobilise a sharing of the school's vision. Its relationship with the School Board/General Council is very limited, although the figures show that these bodies are seen as being participative in function. As regards defining the hierarchical line for the exercising of leadership by intermediate structures, whose recognition and integration is asserted significantly although not insignificant limitations on their actions also exist, liaison is seen to be good, the figures being higher than in the other two regions. It should also be noted that the forms of participation of intermediate leadership in the managing of schools and school clusters in this region is much more assertive than in the Alentejo and Algarve and that their vision of the school is once again mainly characterised, (more markedly so than in the Algarve and less than in the Alentejo) by the educational offer, where it is to the fore over all three regions, as far as the prospective/future opportunities parameter is concerned, and comes in behind the Alentejo, but ahead of the Algarve, in relation to the definition of priority areas of intervention. Here, the figures shown in report indicate that the decision-making processes occupy second position behind the Alentejo, pushing the Algarve into third place. This same is true with regard to the use/flow of information, where again priority is given priority to the community, while, internal communication is the least significant over all three regions.

In summary, the analysis of the data seems to allow us to say that, in general, the leadership exercised by the school Executive Boards/Directors is more defined or stronger in the region of Lisbon and the Tagus Valley and more diffuse in the regions of the Algarve and Alentejo.

The participation of the School Board/General Council in the exercising of authority is not expressed in the reports as being very effective over the three regions, though it may, however, be considered as moderately more significant, in liaison with the school Executive Council/Director, in the regions of the Alentejo and Algarve.

As for the intermediate structures, their participation in the exercising of authority seems to be felt more in the regions of the Algarve and Alentejo, especially in the managing of the pedagogical service than in the Lisbon and Tagus Valley, where the hierarchical line is less established and where the main concern is focused on the monitoring of the educational action and the managing of the pedagogical service.

Additionally, the vision of schools emerging from the reports from the three regions considered (Algarve, Alentejo and Lisbon and Tagus Valley) can be seen to focus mainly on the educational offer and on the definition of priority areas of intervention (although the strategic aspect of the action undertaken by the respective management bodies is not very explicit), and the prospective vision of the school, especially in the regions of the Alentejo and Lisbon and Tagus Valley, is also evident.

On a more pragmatic scale, the data shows that the leadership in the schools under analysis is characterised by the definition of the priority areas of intervention, which is not alien to a certain prospective vision of its performance, which will lead it to a somewhat timid decision-making process.

Pertaining to this, the incipient manner in which it is referred to in the reports analysed, suggests that it may have been played down to a certain extent, especially as regards the capacity of each of the schools' management bodies to assert themselves individually within the scope of the competences attributed to them. The figures analysed largely indicate a standard vision, focusing on processes which create loyalty in the decisions taken with a view to achieving the goals and objectives set forth in the structural documents of the schools or clusters.

A comparative analysis, by region, shows that the number of reports in which this category is most referred to, is in the Alentejo, followed by Lisbon and the Tagus Valley and, lastly by the region of the Algarve. We did not find any explanation for this trend, leaving us with the idea that this is the result of options made by the teams who undertook the external evaluation process in each of the regions studied. The break down, per type of school organisation, is also not clear, with a consistency in the references to decision-making processes of reports from innovative, traditional and diffuse schools.

Pertaining to the flow of information, expressed in the parameters School/Community Relationship, Internal Flow and Negative Aspects, the analysis per region, shows that there are no relevant differences as regards the first two categories under analysis. However, where the negative aspects that inhibit the flow of information are concerned, the Algarve is the region that highlights them most.

To conclude and by way of a summary, it is important to highlight that the results achieved by this study do not allow us to reach conclusions that go beyond the limited scope of the contents of the reports pertaining to external evaluations that were carried out on the schools and school clusters, which are, in fact, a subjective view of an observed reality. The contents of these reports were the result of evidence gathered from various sources, including panel interviews, and there are limitations and constraints in their wording (especially with regard to the limited space available), but also inherent to the fact that the external evaluation was carried out by different teams in each region. This set of circumstances is likely to have contributed to the disperse nature that, as we have said, globally characterises the reports analysed. However, it is important to highlight that each report, *individually*, contains specific information, pertaining to one school or cluster in particular and, in this sense, when it is returned to the school, it expresses the findings of the external evaluation, presenting an opinion on the quality of the education and teaching offered by the school in question, that may contribute to its improvement.

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Legislation

Law 31/2002, of 20th December, approves the system for the evaluation of nursery, primary and secondary education in public, private, cooperative and charity institutions.