

Article

Internships with Portuguese Speakers: Leadership, Organisational Culture and the Current Brain Drain

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Abstract: Doing internships is increasingly common in Portugal, often being regarded as a pre-requisite for entering the labour market. This trend reinforces the need to understand the interns' perception of the ideal characteristics for this type of experience, in order to stop (or at least slow down) the brain drain that is currently felt. This exploratory research aims at reflecting on how organisations can contribute to successful internships. Themes such as the leadership and organisational culture of the host entity are addressed, areas which have been debated less often in the current literature. Our quantitative research was based on a survey, which obtained 143 responses from individuals with internship experience. Data were analysed using descriptive, reliability, inferential, and multiple linear regression analysis. The results from this study showcased a tendency toward servant leadership (in detriment to paternalistic or autocratic leadership) as being the most appropriate leadership style for an internship. It was also possible to emphasise some important points in an internship experience, including remuneration (desired by the interns) and the tasks performed (the interns want to be given responsibilities and meaningful work during their internship). Some of the results obtained are according to the state-of-the-art, however, others diverge.

Keywords: survey; interns' perceptions; servant leadership; horizontal culture; brain drain



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1. Introduction

In Portugal, the youth unemployment rate in the fourth quarter of 2021 was at 23.4% [1], leading to a significant brain drain of valuable human resources. This amount is substantially higher than the average value recorded in the European Union in the same period (14.4%). In the first quarter of 2022, there was a slight drop in the youth unemployment rate to 20.6% [1]. These values are very high and, therefore, highlight the trend in Portugal, which presents a less favourable situation than in the rest of the European Union. A Eurostat report showed that about 70% of young unemployed people in Portugal (between 20 and 34) are more likely to move to a new city or country than any other young person in the European Union. This report also verified that young people with higher qualifications find it easier to leave their country. According to researcher Maria Mendes, this trend can be justified by the precariousness of labour relations and lower-than-expected payments [2].

Internships play a decisive role in integrating young people into the labour market [3] and, consequently, allow youths to increase the likelihood of finding their first job after completing their education [4]. During recruitment processes, organisations tend to prioritise those who have done an internship in the organisation or who already have an internship

experience in the industry [5]. A study conducted in 2019 highlighted that 70% of interns who completed an internship received full-time job offers from the organisation where they completed it [6]. Organisations resort to internships to hire new employees [7]. In this sense, it can be considered that internships can have a strong impact on reducing youth unemployment. Curricular internships, for example, allow students to have an internship experience in which they are inserted into a real work environment. It also allows theoretical knowledge to be applied in a real environment, enabling learning through practical experience [8].

As highlighted by the researcher Maria Mendes, the precariousness of labour relations influences the ease with which young people leave their country [2]. The behaviour and actions of a leader shape and influence the culture that is established in the organisation [9]. Employee appreciation has considerable benefits, particularly in terms of productivity. Respect and appreciation from colleagues also positively influence the task performance of teams [10]. The possibility for employees to develop new knowledge and skills through, for example, individualised support has a positive effect on commitment to the organisation [11]. It is, thus, understood that being in an environment where learning is encouraged is considered positive for employees.

Understanding this phenomenon and the factors that motivate interns to complete an internship is important for organisations to enhance the experience offered. Organisational culture and leadership both have a strong impact on employees, and it is, therefore, necessary to understand the expectations and the ideas perceived by those who have already completed an internship. Understanding what has gone well and poorly in past internships will allow for the improvement of future internships. The purpose of this study is to gain clarity and identify practices that can improve the organisation of internship programmes.

The purpose of this research is to analyse interns' perceptions of their internship experience, focusing mainly on the inherent aspects of leadership and organisational culture. There was a need to deepen these topics, especially regarding leadership. The purpose is to identify the characteristics that, based on the participants' opinions, play an important role in an internship experience and can make the internship a negative experience. Our study also intends to identify an ideal leadership style for internships, based on the perspectives obtained.

Besides this brief introduction, the paper follows this structure. Next, we present the theoretical background and hypotheses development. Then, the materials and methods are presented, followed by the results. Immediately after, the discussion, conclusion, and references used are presented.

In sum, the research questions of this study are:

- What leadership style appeals to a intern?
- What kind of organisational culture appeals to a intern?
- What organisational factors affect the internship experience of interns?

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Internships

In general, internships, regardless of their typology, allow the host entity and the intern to have a better understanding of the other before they commit to an employment contract [12]. They also allow the development of superior skills and the exchange of experiences and knowledge with the employees of the host entity [13]. Interns recognise the value of this type of experience, especially if there is an alignment between the work developed and their career goals [14]. In many ways, the internship has a positive impact on the intern, resulting in better job skills, greater job satisfaction, and an increased chance of finding a first job after graduation [4]. Despite the recognised advantages, there are also negative impressions concerning internships. They are sometimes considered part-time jobs, in which interns are a cheap (or free) labour force [15]. Increasingly there is heightened concern to ensure that unpaid internships are not confused with unpaid work. The difference between the two is tenuous, so host entities must ensure a beneficial experience for the intern [16]. Unpaid internships should be experiences focused on

knowledge development and learning, because the main benefits should be for the interns. For the host entity, there should only be collateral benefits [17].

Internships are a growing trend in Portugal, whether curricular, professional, or with access to a professional order, etc. From 2011 (to 2016), over 272 thousand young people were covered by the “IEFP’s Employment Internships” programme. Despite the opportunity that this programme provides, there are more and more complaints and dissatisfaction situations. It is noted that interns often do not perform tasks related to their area of training and are often forced to take on roles of responsibility without any support. Internships are frequently unpaid [18].

2.2. Leadership

In the GLOBE project, leadership is defined as: “the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organisations of which they are members” [19] (p. 15). In Portugal, an effective leader can combine their competence and organisational skills to perform their work with the support and consideration given to employees. Effective leaders are also identified as a good communicator, “human”, fair, and capable to motivate employees [20].

The APS mindset model considers three leadership styles [21]. The authoritarian leader practices absolute control over their followers, who must obey their orders and requests without question [22]. They often make decisions alone, without receiving feedback and input from others, and define clear lines of action [23,24]. The behaviour of the authoritarian leader can reduce the affective trust of the employees towards the organisation and the leader. This leadership negatively affects the intrinsic motivation of those around the leader [25]. The paternalistic leader has the role of supporting and, in a certain way, “taking care” of their subordinates [26]. A parental mindset is adopted, resulting in a parent–child relational dynamic [21]. A leader who adopts this leadership style is willing to guide the professional life of their followers and also their personal lives, with a paternalistic approach. In exchange, the leader expects loyalty [27]. Servant leadership is based on the idea that leaders exist to “serve” employees and to practice minimal control over them [28]. It is characterised by the clear definition of goals and the exchange and sharing of information [29]. If the servant leader can think from the position of others and can help them find solutions to their problems [30], they are able to act as better human beings [31]. The leader considers that one of their main roles is to give emotional support to employees as they grow and develop their skills [31].

A study by Au-Yong Oliveira and Ferreira [32] reflected on the leadership style adopted in some organisations in Portugal. There was a predominance of the authoritarian style, followed by the paternalistic one. The servant leadership style was the least frequent; however, it was [already, in 2011] the leadership style that was most preferred. In the same study, some participants considered that the servant style would not work in Portugal because there is the idea that it is necessary to tell employees what they must do. However, there is a desire to change the leadership styles adopted, with a move away from authoritarian leadership and a growing demand for servant leadership [32]. The influence felt by TROIKA (the European Central Bank, the International Monetary fund, and the European Commission) may explain the above, following the financial crisis of 2011, whereby Portugal required a bailout and financial aid (EUR 78 billion) to avoid bankruptcy.

2.3. Organisational Culture

Culture provides insight into an organisation, involving aspects such as its mission, its philosophy, and its social values [33], including proximity between subordinates and organisational leaders. Culture also influences the way of operating and the type of relationship established between customers and employees [34]. Each organisation has its own organisational culture, which can represent a point of differentiation [33]. Cultures vary in the intensity with which they are oriented towards hierarchy or equality. In the horizontal culture there is an appreciation of equality, as opposed to the vertical culture in

which there is greater evidence of hierarchy. These two culture orientations are associated with different values, concepts of power, and expectations [35].

A horizontal culture is associated with a greater involvement of the leader, who moves around and is present in the same space as the other employees. This proximity allows a direct support and a faster decision-making process [36]. In horizontal patterns, people look at each other as equals [37]. In contrast, in the vertical dimension, status is important, there is a greater hierarchy, and the organisational members are seen to be subject to greater internal competition [38].

Hofstede's cultural dimensions allow to understand the cultural differences between different countries. According to the developed framework, the analysis of national culture can be made based on the following dimensions: distance to power; collectivism vs. individualism; uncertainty avoidance; long- or short-term orientation; masculinity vs. femininity; and indulgence/restriction [39,40]. Portugal is presented as a country where hierarchical distance is accepted, as is managerial control. Portugal fits into the collectivist category, there being a long-term commitment to group members. Portugal is presented as a country with a tendency to promote consensus rather than excessive competitiveness; there is a preference for uncertainty avoidance, so there is a low long-term orientation, and Portugal falls within the realm of cultures of restraint [41]. The original study by Hofstede has been highly cited and also highly criticised, perhaps leaving room for further considerations and improvements, as the main study was conducted from the 1960s onwards. Perhaps some older Portuguese citizens still think according to Hofstede, albeit the younger millennial generation (in particular) may have changed due to technology and the transparency it offers.

2.4. Hypotheses Development

Often, internship experiences are seen as a learning tool [42] that allows interns to relate classroom knowledge to the labour market [43]. Experiential learning is often perceived as essential in the educational process, allowing students to be an active element in the teaching and learning process [44]. It has a positive effect on learning and allows interns to apply the knowledge gained in practical solutions, enabling "learning by doing" [8]. It can happen in the classroom or outside it, for example, with internship experiences [44]. In the classroom, the learning process is more formal and structured as opposed to the real work environment, which is more informal, resulting from task completion and interaction with a mentor [45,46]. Mentors play an important role in the success of the experience, being responsible for, for example, providing feedback, support, and follow-up throughout the internship period [47,48]. Effective mentors are visionary, participatory, and believe in employee development [49].

Direct-contact learning experiences enable the acquisition of new knowledge and can lead to an improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of the education process [50]. Experimental learning experiences allow to enhance students' learning, improve their satisfaction, contribute to their professional training [8], and improve their preparation for a career, etc. [51]. Thus, the following hypotheses are presented:

Hypothesis 1. *The development of competencies is not independent of the internship, as the internship is expected to provide the interns with the development of their competencies.*

Hypothesis 2. *The attitude of a teacher is not independent of being a mentor, and the mentor is expected to assume a "teacher" attitude at the initial stage of the internship.*

Human beings need to have certain aspects they value answered, such as prestige, independence, fulfilment, and a sense of belonging to a group. When this does not happen, their work can be compromised. A successful leader should understand that humans are complex and different from each other and act on that assumption [52]. Overall, followers value the relationships established with others, in terms of trust, respect, admiration, and open communication, abiding also by a task (and results) orientation [20].

The way the leader acts affects the performance of the employees: “when the leader is in a happy mood, the people around them view everything in a more positive light” [53] (p. 4). The satisfaction and happiness they show is reflected in the employees, who become more optimistic about the goals set and more creative and efficient in decision-making [53]. In Portugal, there is a strong influence of the leader’s behaviours on followers’ attitudes [20]. The following hypothesis is hence presented:

Hypothesis 3. *The practised leadership style is not independent of intern satisfaction, as it is expected that a more optimistic leadership style results in greater intern satisfaction.*

In an internship, interns expect to expand and acquire new knowledge, which is difficult to develop in a theoretical context [42]. By meeting this expectation, host institutions can provide positive experiences. They must, therefore, ensure challenging jobs and demonstrate trust in their employees/interns [54]. The characteristics of the work environment, namely the type of supervision practiced, the learning opportunities, and the characteristics of the work developed, which include the importance of the tasks and the feedback given, are presented as factors that influence interns’ satisfaction. Interns show greater satisfaction when their work has a significant impact on other people or the organisation [42].

Interns seek to perform challenging tasks that enhance learning and have a contribution to the organisation [55]. However, some consider that the tasks to be performed by interns should not replace those of other employees, since they should be small and performed under supervision [17]. In this context, the following hypothesis arises:

Hypothesis 4. *Responsibility is not independent of whether a person is a intern or not, and it is expected that interns will find it important to be given meaningful tasks.*

A study concluded that in Portugal an effective leader is motivating and able to provide support, relate to their followers, and maintain and ensure clear communication. In terms of task orientation, the leader can clarify roles, tasks, and goals and also show organisational and planning skills [20]. Some of these characteristics are aligned with servant leadership. In this leadership style, the leader is focused on the employees and is able to create strong relationships with them [29]. The implementation of this leadership style has been shown to be conditioned by cultural and religious factors in studies conducted in Brazil [56]. In Portugal, this style is not frequent, and there is a certain skepticism regarding its success. This perception stems, in part, from the idea that in Portugal it is necessary to tell employees what they should do. It was found that the preferred leadership style by the participants is servant leadership [32].

Based on the literature review, we sought to test whether this leadership style is perceived as the ideal style for an internship experience. To this end, the “APS mindset model” was used, which considers three leadership styles that can be adopted in an organisation: servant leadership, autocratic leadership, and paternalistic leadership [21]. As a result, the following hypothesis emerged:

Hypothesis 5. *The leader’s support, monitoring, and concern are not independent of the internship, and servant leadership is expected to be the most suitable for an internship experience.*

3. Methods

This study uses a quantitative method as a way of data collection. It aims to analyse and understand the reality of the internships carried out by the sample considered for this purpose. The questionnaire is the most widely used data-collection instrument in the survey method [57]. It is characterised by the presentation of a set of questions to be answered by respondents. It allows for time saving, while reaching more people, getting answers quickly, and allowing greater freedom in the answers—because it is anonymous [58].

3.1. Data-Collection Procedure

This study had the voluntary participation of 143 individuals, all of whom had an internship experience of at least three months and understood Portuguese. After the questionnaire was created, it was placed online on the Microsoft Forms platform, with the respective link sent via LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram to researchers' contacts between 4 and 23 May 2022. Therefore, the sampling process was non-probabilistic and convenient, intentionally the snowball type [59].

The online questionnaire contained information about the study's objective and the confidentiality of the answers. Its purpose was to identify the characteristics of the internships carried out by the participants and reflect on the type of leadership adopted by the host entities. It aims to identify the type of leadership seen as ideal and the motivation for carrying out an internship, etc. The questionnaire consists of 25 questions and has an estimated response time of 10 min. The first section of the questionnaire includes multiple-choice sociodemographic questions. The second section includes open-ended, multiple-choice, and Likert-scale questions. This section aims at understanding in greater detail the characteristics of the participants' internship experience, including the type of leadership and the organisational culture.

3.2. Participants

A total of 143 responses were obtained with the questionnaire. Most participants belong to the female gender (80.4%) and are Portuguese (97.2%). About 45.5% of the participants belong to the 18–25 age group (45.5%), followed by the 46–55 age group, which represents 24.5% of the respondents. In terms of professional occupation, 54.5% of the participants are employees, followed by the group of students that includes 21.7% of the participants. Most participants have completed higher education (62.9%), followed by a master's degree or MBA (19.6%).

Through the questionnaire, we sought to understand some of the characteristics of the internships carried out by the participants: 41.3% had an internship of 3 to 6 months, and 25.9% had an internship of 10 to 12 months (25.9%); most participants had their first contact with the labour market through the internship (55.2%); a curricular internship (51.4%) was the internship most carried out by the participants, followed by a professional internship (34.3%); 49.0% had an unpaid internship, 43.4% a "paid, equal or higher than the minimum wage" internship, and 7.7% a "paid, below the minimum wage" internship.

3.3. Data-Analysis Procedure

Data was analysed using IBM SPSS statistics software, version 28 (IBM, New York, NY, USA). The internal consistency of the questionnaire was analysed via Cronbach's alpha. The internal consistency of the scales must be above 0.7 [60]. The pre-test was performed using Cronbach's alpha on a sample of 32 participants. It allowed the internal consistency to be tested [61] and to make the necessary adaptations to improve it.

In order to test the hypotheses formulated for this study, chi-squared tests were performed. For mean comparison, independent sample t-student and ANOVA one-way tests were used. Variable association was tested through Pearson's correlation. The effect of the indicators that influenced satisfaction was tested through multiple linear regression testing.

3.4. Measures

The questionnaire (Appendix A) was based on the leader–member exchange theory [62] and on the job characteristic model [63]. Five scales were used in the questionnaire: "satisfaction regarding the internship experience" with 9 items; "characteristics of practised leadership" with 4 items; "leader's way of communicating with the intern" with 4 items; "relationship with the host entity's mentor with 5 items; and "general considerations regarding the internship" with 9 items. The scales' items were based on the work of some authors, including: the "Organizational Leadership Assessment" instrument developed by James Laub [64]; Gupta et al. [65]; D'Abate et al. [42]; Mihail [66]; Crowell [4]; Hurst

and Good [16]; Liden [67]; De Hoogh and Den Hartog [68]; Kalshoven et al. [69]; De Kleijn et al. [70]; and Rothman [55]; Coimbra [36]. To understand the type of leadership practiced during the internship experiences, the APS mindset model was used [21]. Two types of Likert scales were used in the questionnaire. For the topics of satisfaction, leadership, and communication and to understand the ideal characteristics of internships, a Likert scale from 1 to 5 was used, where 1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree”. In the scope of the relationship established with the supervisor of the host entity, a Likert scale from 1 to 5 was used where 1 = “never” and 5 = “always”.

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha (Table 1). All scales have a consistency of 0.7 or above, indicating a high consistency [60].

Table 1. Reliability of scales.

Scale	α	Number of Items
Satisfaction regarding the internship	0.89	9
Characteristics of practised leadership	0.90	4
Leader’s way of communicating with the intern	0.89	3
Relationship with the host entity’s mentor	0.91	5
General considerations regarding the internship	0.70	9

4. Results

One of the main reasons for doing an internship was the fact that it was compulsory/part of a bachelor’s or master’s degree or professional course (49.7%). It was also found that some respondents chose to do an internship to gain work experience (13.29%) or to integrate the labour market (13.99%). Regarding the culture and leadership perceived in the host entity by the participants, it was found that 60.1% of the participants perceived servant leadership in the host entity, followed by paternalistic leadership (20.3%), and authoritarian leadership (19.6%). Regarding organisational culture, the perception of the participants reveals that there was a horizontal culture (78.3%) to the detriment of vertical culture (21.7%). Most participants also considered that proactivity was valued (86%). Most participants recommended the internship experience (94.4%).

4.1. Analysis of Leadership and Organisational Culture in Internship Experiences

The results show that there is a preference for “servant leadership”, with 90.2% of the participants preferring this style. Authoritarian leadership registered only 1.4% of preferences, indicating a reluctance to consider this form of leadership as a positive one.

In total, about 29.4% of the participants identified with the expression “shouted at or treated badly during the internship”, indicating that during their internship they had at some point experienced a situation of this nature. Regarding organisational culture, it appears that in the majority of situations there was a horizontal culture (78.3%), which is also the type of culture preferred by the participants (97.9%).

Many of the participants considered that they would not change anything about their internship experience (27.27%), others would change the institution where they did their internship (4.57%). It was also found that many of the participants would change the remuneration aspect (26.57%) (e.g., not being paid), while some participants would change the type of orientation they had (6.99%).

4.2. Comparison of Means

Mean comparison tests were performed (Student t-test for independent samples and one way ANOVA) after verifying the respective assumptions to test the effect of sociodemographic variables on the variables under study. Only the results considered statistically significant are presented (Table 2).

Table 2. Results of one way ANOVA and post hoc test.

Dependent Variable	ANOVA One Way		Tuckey HSD test		
	F	p	Group A	Group B	p
General Considerations regarding the internship	3.09 *	0.049	Paid equal or higher than the minimum salary (M = 3.90; SD = 0.90)	Not remunerated (M = 3.60; SD = 0.95)	0.041
	11.13 ***	<0.001	Equal or less than 12th grade (M = 4.02; SD = 0.34)	Graduate (M = 4.37; SD = 0.39)	<0.001
				Master's degree or higher (M = 4.48; SD = 0.28)	<0.001

Note. * $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$.

The results indicated that the nature of the internship had a significant effect on general considerations regarding the internship ($F(4, 138) = 3.09$; $p = 0.049$), with participants with training who were paid equal to or higher than the minimum salary having better general considerations regarding the internship than participants who were not paid.

Regarding educational qualifications, these also have a significant effect on general considerations regarding the internship ($F(2, 140) = 3.09$; $p < 0.001$), with participants with a master's degree or higher showing better general considerations regarding the internship than participants with a 12th-grade education or less.

4.3. Association between Variables

The association between the variables was carried out using Pearson's correlations (Table 3).

Table 3. Association between variables.

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Satisfaction regarding the internship	–				
2. Characteristics of practised leadership	0.63 ***	–			
3. Relationship with the host entity's mentor	0.45 ***	0.51 ***	–		
4. General considerations regarding the internship	0.34 ***	0.22 **	0.13	–	
5. Leader's way of communicating with the intern	0.60 ***	0.80 ***	0.59 ***	0.12	–

Note. ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

The results indicate that satisfaction regarding the internship is positively and significantly correlated with the characteristics of the practised leadership, the relationship with the host entity's mentor, the general considerations regarding the internship, and the leader's way of communicating with the intern and that the relationship with the characteristics of practised leadership is the strongest. The characteristics of practised leadership is positively and significantly correlated with the relationship with the host entity's mentor, with the general considerations regarding the internship and the leader's way of communicating with the intern. The relationship with the host entity's mentor is positively and significantly correlated with the leader's way of communicating with the intern.

4.4. Multiple Linear Regression

The multiple linear regression allowed to relate the dependent variable "satisfaction regarding the internship" with the independent variables "characteristics of practised leadership", "relationship with the host entity's mentor", "general considerations regarding the internship", and "leader's way of communicating with the intern" (Table 4).

Table 4. Indicator coefficient (SPSS statistics).

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	F	p	R2a	β	p
Characteristics of practised leadership	Satisfaction regarding the internship	31.79 ***	<0.001	0.46	0.34 **	0.001
Relationship with the host entity's mentor					0.11	0.153
General considerations regarding the internship					0.22 ***	<0.001
Leader's way of communicating with the intern					0.23 *	0.037

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

The results indicate that only characteristics of practised leadership ($\beta = 0.34$; $p = 0.001$) and general considerations regarding the internship ($\beta = 0.22$; $p < 0.001$) leader's way of communicating with the intern ($\beta = 0.23$; $p = 0.037$) have a positive and significant effect on satisfaction regarding the internship. The model explains 46% of the variability in the dependent variable and is statistically significant ($F(4, 138) = 31.79$; $p < 0.001$).

4.5. Hypotheses Testing

The chi-squared test was used to validate the alternative hypotheses defined. Only tables with two cells were used, all with expected frequency values greater than 5. Since the degrees of freedom were 1, Yate's correction was performed in all cases.

Hypothesis 1, "the development of competencies is not independent of the internship, as the internship is expected to provide the interns with the development of their competencies", was confirmed with a 99.9% degree of certainty (Table 5).

Table 5. Chi-squared test: Hypothesis 1.

	O	E	O-E	$ O-E -0.5$	$(O-E -0.5)^2$	$(O-E -0.5)^2/E$
No	10	71.5	-61.5	61	3721	52.04
Yes	133	71.5	61.5	61	3721	52.04
Total						104.08

Hypothesis 2, "the attitude of a teacher is not independent of being a mentor, and the mentor is expected to assume a "teacher" attitude at the initial stage of the internship", was tested. The result is considerably high (111.02), evidencing, with a 99.99% degree of certainty, the veracity of Hypothesis 2 (Table 6).

Table 6. Chi-squared test: Hypothesis 2.

	O	E	O-E	$ O-E -0.5$	$(O-E -0.5)^2$	$(O-E -0.5)^2/E$
No	8	71.5	-63.5	63	3969	55.51
Yes	135	71.5	63.5	63	3969	55.51
Total						111.02

To understand if the practiced leadership style affects the satisfaction with the internship, the chi-squared test was also applied. Hypothesis 3, "the practised leadership style is not independent of intern satisfaction, as it is expected that a more optimistic leadership style results in greater intern satisfaction", was confirmed with a degree of 99.9% certainty (Table 7).

Table 7. Chi-squared test: Hypothesis 3.

	O	E	O-E	$ O-E -0.5$	$(O-E -0.5)^2$	$(O-E -0.5)^2/E$
No	6	71.5	-65.5	65	4225	59.09
Yes	137	71.5	65.5	65	4225	59.09
Total						118.18

Hypothesis 4, “responsibility is not independent of whether you are a intern or not, and it is expected that interns will find it important to be given meaningful tasks”, was confirmed with a 99.9% degree of certainty (Table 8).

Table 8. Chi-squared test: Hypothesis 4.

	O	E	O−E	O−E −0.5	(O−E −0.5) ²	(O−E −0.5) ² /E
No	12	71.5	−59.5	59	3481	48.69
Yes	131	71.5	59.5	59	3481	48.69
Total						97.38

Hypothesis 5, “The leader’s support, monitoring and concern are not independent of the internship, and servant leadership is expected to be the most suitable for an internship experience”, was confirmed with a 99.9% degree of certainty (Table 9).

Table 9. Chi-squared test: Hypothesis 5.

	O	E	O−E	O−E −0.5	(O−E −0.5) ²	(O−E −0.5) ² /E
No	14	71.5	−57.5	57	3249	45.44
Yes	129	71.5	57.5	57	3249	45.44
Total						90.88

5. Discussion

The questionnaire collected information about the participants’ internship experience and allowed to better understand their perception of certain key aspects. It also allowed testing the five hypotheses presented above.

It was found, however, that although this was not the main trend, some participants (29.4%) agreed that they were not always treated well and were sometimes shouted at. Since an internship is a preparation for the labour market, this behaviour can have a significant impact on those involved. It can be associated with authoritarian leadership, where the leader controls and imposes their authority on employees [22]. These results are not the main trend and are not in line with the idea that authoritarian leadership is the style most adopted in organisations in Portugal [32].

Regarding the good practices associated with internships, it was found that giving positive feedback is important. This idea is consistent with the literature review, which denotes the importance of feedback [55]. Most participants believe that all internships should be paid. Remuneration was also identified by several participants as one of the aspects that they would change about their internship. In the literature, internship remuneration is not identified as a factor that impacts satisfaction [42], nor is it decisive for attending an internship [71]. When analysing the results obtained in the questionnaire, it can be considered that remuneration has a significant impact on how interns perceive their experience.

When doing an internship, interns aim to expand and to develop knowledge that is not achieved in a theoretical context [42], which was verified with the confirmation of Hypothesis 1. An internship is a learning tool [42,72], which allows learning by doing [8]. The validation of Hypothesis 2 reinforces this idea. Nevertheless, the relationship with the mentor (in the firm) did not prove to have a significant influence on satisfaction.

The validation of Hypothesis 3 refers to the idea that intern satisfaction is affected by the leadership style adopted. The way a leader behaves influences the performance of employees [53]. An effective leader can increase employee satisfaction, motivation, and commitment [20]. It can be considered that the way an organisation is led will have an impact on its long-term results, since it affects the behaviour of its employees. It was found that interns show greater satisfaction when they are assigned tasks with significant impact on others [42], that they seek challenging tasks [54,55], and that they value feedback sharing [54] and the opportunity to perform different roles [73]. The validation of Hypothesis 4 is aligned with the findings presented in previous studies.

Servant leadership is pointed out as the leadership style indicated for an internship (Hypothesis 5). The characteristics of this leadership style make it an appropriate style for internships, since the leader is willing to help others grow and develop new knowledge, showing that the leader is not exclusively focused on achieving organisational goals. Since an internship is a learning experience, it is important that this frame of mind exists in the organisation.

The results obtained from the questionnaire allow us to answer the research questions initially outlined in the introduction section.

Practical Implications

Portuguese speakers are seen to be excellent human resources who do well wherever they go to work, in whatever country they are in. Hence, they need to be given the opportunities they desire and require to develop, otherwise they may emigrate. The study shows how a change in society has occurred, whereby interns intend to be led by servant leaders rather than by autocratic or even paternalistic leaders. With servant leaders, the emphasis is on development. Leadership should be about the people and supporting them. If interns do not encounter such servant leadership, they may well be dissatisfied and disenchanted, and this may explain the high emigration rates amongst the younger population in Portugal.

For companies, this study allows them to better understand the perspective of those who have already completed internships and to adapt their practices to meet that expectation.

6. Conclusions

Currently, more and more people are doing internships, partly because they are increasingly promoted by university programmes and the IEFP (Institute for Employment and Professional Training). They are often the first contact with the labour market, so it is important that they are positive experiences that help to gain clarity about one's professional future. Regarding the main motivations for doing an internship, it appears that participants see this type of experience as a way to enter the labour market more quickly and to gain experience. Attending an internship is associated with these benefits; however, the way the host entities perceive the internship and their leadership characteristics and culture have a significant impact on the overall internship outcome. A law may be important to guide the practice of internships, regulating aspects such as remuneration (most internships attended by Portuguese speakers were not remunerated, according to our study, despite a desire for the opposite, to, hence, follow practices in other more developed countries, such as Germany).

Leadership style is also an important aspect to consider in an internship. During the period in which the intern is inserted in the host entity, they are affected by the type of leadership practiced, the characteristics of the organisational culture, the work environment, the physical conditions, etc. The respondents reveal a clear preference for servant leadership. It can, thus, be considered that interns seek a leader who is willing to share power, who encourages them to progress and develop new knowledge, who emphasises collaboration, who demonstrates good communication skills, and who promotes community building [74]. This trend is contrary to Hofstede's prior analysis, some decades ago, in which Portugal is presented as a country that tolerates power distance and management control [40,41]. Servant leadership is perceived as the most appropriate leadership style for an internship, according to our study, being, therefore, an additional major aspect for consideration by managers and leaders. Indeed, appropriate leadership practices may perhaps stop (or at least slow down) emigration by seemingly dissatisfied youths in general [75] (Portugal is projected to have half its current population emigrate by the end of the 21st century). Servant leadership is often associated with experiential education, and the concept "service-learning" has emerged [76]. The leader promotes the development of knowledge and skills, managing to create a learning culture [31]. Since an internship is an experience with a strong learning side, this form of leadership is suitable to promote an environment conducive to learning and integration into the labour market. Regarding

the organisational culture, the horizontal culture is identified as the most suitable for an internship, allowing greater proximity between superiors and interns (again, contrary to Hofstede's [40,41] findings).

Confronting the results obtained in this study with the literature review, there seems, therefore, to have been a change in society. A more inclusive and humane leadership style, more focused on people and with servant leadership characteristics, is preferable to a more authoritarian leadership style, in which distance to power predominates (and, whereby, subordinates feel distanced and not accountable nor responsible for decision-making).

Limitations and Future Research Opportunities

This study allowed us to analyse the perspective of different interns. This analysis allowed the identification of certain trends and favourable behaviours in an internship experience. A longer period of time (for data-collection purposes) would have allowed a larger number of answers to be obtained from the questionnaire. Albeit, the lead author was limited by their master's thesis delivery timeframe.

In the future, this study can be replicated in a sample composed exclusively of people who carried out their internship in Portugal. The application to other cultures/countries would allow us to compare and analyse the perceptions of interns, regarding the leadership style and organisational culture that best suits them. By obtaining different perspectives it would be possible to identify possible trends, taking into account different cultural patterns. This study did not focus on any particular type of internship, but, in the future, it may be relevant to explore in more depth the most suitable characteristics for different types of experiences (curricular, professional, and voluntary). The focus on specific sectors of activity can be positive for organisations within those sectors. Such a focus may be relevant due to the different roles and responsibilities associated with different areas; for example, a focus on the education/teaching area may bring different results from those obtained in this study. Hence, in the future, it may be relevant to study the importance of leadership and organisational culture in each internship typology and in different areas, such as education, services, business, etc.

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Appendix A

Research instrument.

Questionnaire

Within the scope of academic work, we request your participation in this questionnaire, with a primary objective to identify the internships' characteristics and understand the participants' perspectives. The questionnaire has an estimated time of 10 min. If you have carried out more than one internship, please consider the first one to answer the questionnaire.

The data collected will be used exclusively for research purposes, and the confidentiality of the participants will be maintained. Data analysis will be done in an anonymous and aggregated form.

Thank you for your participation.

A. Characteristics of the Internship

Do you work in the sector in which you did your internship?		Yes	No
Duration of the internship	Between 3 and 6 months		
	Between 7 and 9 months		
	Between 10 and 12 months		
	12 months or more		
Was the internship your first contact with the labour market?		Yes	No
Type of internship	Curricular internship		
	Professional internship		
	Voluntary internship		
	Internship as part of a vocational education course		
	Other		
Type of internship (concerning payment)	paid below the minimum wage		
	minimum wage or more		
	unpaid		

B. Internship Experience

Reasons that motivated your decision to do an internship
--

C. Satisfaction Regarding the Internship Experience

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	5	
1. I have developed new skills and knowledge as a result of the internship.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The internship was important in helping me to understand the reality of the organization.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The internship helped me to learn to work in a team.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The work I did was challenging and stimulating.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The internship gave me considerable opportunities to do my work independently and with freedom.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I was better prepared to enter the world of work after the internship experience.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The internship experience helped me to clarify my career goals.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Overall, I was satisfied with my internship.	1	2	3	4	5
9. If I had the choice, I would do the internship again.	1	2	3	4	5

D. Leadership Style Adopted by Superiors

Authoritarian/autocratic leadership: the leader centralises decisions, holds total power, and creates fear.

Paternalistic/affiliative leadership: the leader is a father figure and in return expects loyalty.

“Servant leadership”: the leader values and seeks to enhance the development of people, is authentic, shares power, and creates a community.

E. With Which Leadership Style Do You Prefer to Interact with?

Authoritarian/autocratic leadership

Paternalistic/affiliative leadership

“Servant leadership”

F. Characteristics of Practiced Leadership

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5
1. The leader delegated tasks.				1 2 3 4 5
2. The leader was concerned with ensuring that employees achieved their goals.				1 2 3 4 5
3. The leader clarified what was expected of the intern and the other employees.				1 2 3 4 5
4. The leadership adopted met the expectations.				1 2 3 4 5

G. Leader’s Way of Communicating with Interns

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5
1. Were you shouted at or treated badly during the internship?				1 2 3 4 5
2. The leader cared about their followers.				1 2 3 4 5
3. The working environment was good.				1 2 3 4 5
4. The leader promoted open communication and the exchange of information.				1 2 3 4 5

H. Relationship with the Host Entity’s Mentor

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5
1. The mentor provided feedback regarding the work you did well.				1 2 3 4 5
2. The mentor provided feedback regarding work that you did not do well.				1 2 3 4 5
3. The mentor supervised the work you were doing.				1 2 3 4 5
4. The mentor was concerned with your well-being.				1 2 3 4 5
5. The mentor assigned me tasks that allowed me to develop new skills.				1 2 3 4 5
Pro-activity and initiative were valued				Yes No

I. The Organisational Culture of the Host Entity Was:

horizontal (more accessible leaders, who circulate throughout the company)

vertical (less accessible leaders, who are enclosed in their offices)

J. What Is Your Preference in Terms of Organisational Culture?

horizontal (more accessible leaders, who circulate throughout the company)

vertical (less accessible leaders, who are enclosed in their offices)

K. General Considerations in Relation to the Internship

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5
1. Positive feedback is important in an internship experience.				
			1	2 3 4 5
2. Negative feedback is important in an internship experience.				
			1	2 3 4 5
3. The internship helped to find a job.				
			1	2 3 4 5
4. Interns must have tasks of responsibility.				
			1	2 3 4 5
5. Interns should have the opportunity to innovate and put their creativity into practice.				
			1	2 3 4 5
6. All internships must be paid.				
			1	2 3 4 5
7. The leadership style practised affects the satisfaction with the internship.				
			1	2 3 4 5
8. The organisational culture affects the satisfaction with the internship.				
			1	2 3 4 5
9. At an early stage, mentors should assume a “teacher” role, in the way that they teach the interns how to carry out their tasks.				
			1	2 3 4 5
Do you recommend the internship experience?				Yes No
What would you change about your internship if you could?				

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