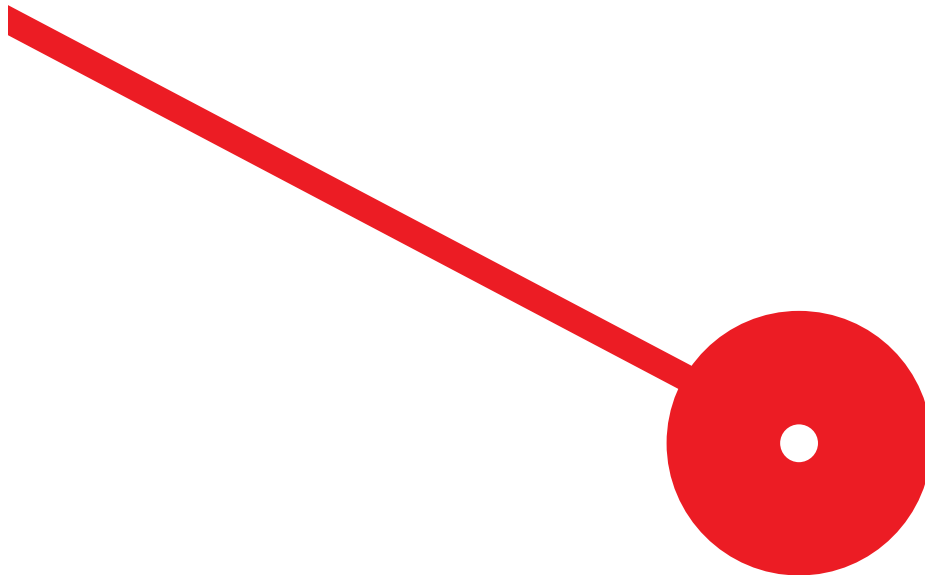




Covet Group: Managing global markets with intercultural acuity.

Lara Manuela Pinto de Sousa

10/2023

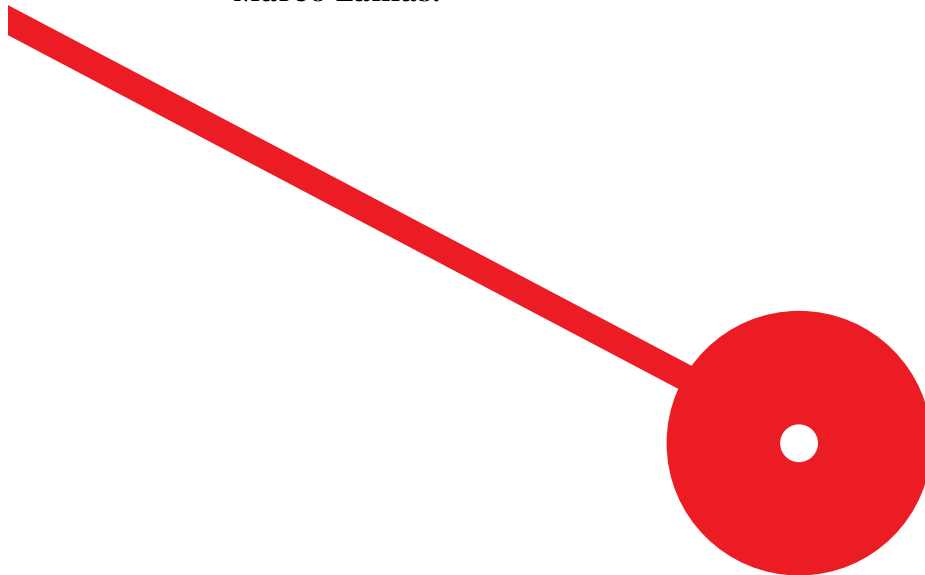




Covet Group: Managing global markets with intercultural acuity.

Lara Manuela Pinto de Sousa

Internship report submitted to the Porto Accounting and Business School to obtain the master's degree in Intercultural Studies for Business under supervision of Professor Doctor Marco Lamas.



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Resumo:

O presente relatório é realizado como trabalho final do mestrado em Estudos Interculturais para Negócios pelo Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto (ISCAP). O objetivo deste relatório é avaliar e analisar o meu estágio de quatro meses na empresa Covet Group, com particular ênfase no meu trabalho com as marcas Luxxu e PullCast. Covet Group é uma agência de design de renome que opera a um nível premium, reconhecida pela sua extensa coleção de marcas de luxo. A missão central desta organização é criar produtos de mobiliário requintados que combinem qualidade excepcional e design apelativo para satisfazer as necessidades de clientes exigentes em todo o mundo.

Este documento irá explorar a forma como a cultura empresarial, a comunicação intercultural e a consciência intercultural estão interligadas e a sua importância crescente no mundo empresarial atual. Além disso, é importante incluir a empresa anfitriã no contexto do mercado de mobiliário de luxo, seguido de uma análise abrangente da estrutura empresarial da mesma. Neste contexto, analisarei a minha experiência como estagiária numa empresa multinacional, o que ajuda a confirmar as teorias que estudei. No panorama empresarial global, é essencial que as empresas tenham uma compreensão profunda das diferentes culturas para terem sucesso e prosperarem nos mercados internacionais.

Palavras-chave: Covet Group; Estágio; Cultura empresarial; Interculturalidade; Negócios internacionais

Abstract:

The present report is conducted as the final work of the master's degree in Intercultural Studies for Business at the Porto Accounting and Business School (ISCAP). The goal of this report is to evaluate and analyse my four-month internship at The Covet Group, with a particular emphasis on my work with the Luxxu and PullCast brands. Covet Group is a renowned design agency operating at a premium level, renowned for its extensive collection of luxury brands. The central mission of this organization is to produce exquisitely crafted furniture products that combine exceptional quality and appealing design to meet the needs of discerning clients worldwide.

This paper will explore how corporate culture, intercultural communication, and cross-cultural awareness are interconnected and their growing importance in today's business world. Furthermore, it is important to include the host company within the context of the luxury furniture market, followed by a comprehensive analysis of the company's corporate structure. Within this context, I will analyse my experience as an intern at a multinational corporation, which helps confirm the theories I've studied. In the global business landscape, it is essential for companies to have a deep understanding of different cultures to succeed and prosper in international markets.

Key words: Covet Group; Internship; Corporate Culture; Interculturality; International Business

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AM – Account Manager

CAGR – Compound annual growth rate

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

COO – Chief Operating Officer

CRM – Customer relationship management

CSR – Customer services representative

EU – European Union

IDV – Individualism

IND – Indulgence

LTO – Long Term Orientation

LX – Luxxu

MKT – Marketing

MAS – Masculinity

MDL – Modern Desing and Living

PC – PullCast

PDI – Power Distance

SD – Sales Developers

UAI – Uncertainty Avoidance

US – United States of America

INTRODUCTION

An internship is perhaps one of the most significant aspects of a graduate's theoretical learning, offering hands-on experience of how to apply what was learned during one's academic career. Essentially, it operationalizes the knowledge acquired throughout an academic program. Additionally, it enables the expansion of professional networks and offers personal and career growth opportunities. Hence, why I chose an internship to accompany this final chapter of my master's degree in Intercultural Studies for Business. Between February 1st and May 26th, I had the opportunity to partake in an internship program at Covet Group. I assumed the role of a sales developer with the responsibility of operating within several markets, which allowed me to effectively employ the skills I acquired during my master's degree.

Modern and multifaceted as it is, interculturality cannot be properly discussed from just one angle. Intercultural studies are increasingly essential for businesses to thrive in today's global economy since it affects and impacts so many facets of human existence. Since The Covet Group operates across many continents and has business relationships with a wide variety of countries, it was important to establish a connection between the two during the research phase. This internship at a luxury design industry leader exemplifies the need of intercultural competence for businesses operating in today's increasingly complicated global marketplace. We'll see how Covet Group's success can be related in large part by their ability to embrace cultural differences in order to connect with clients and partners all around the world.

The objectives for the realization of the internship were:

- Research and analyse the cultural influences on Covet Group's management;
- Apply the master's degree knowledge to the internship experience at the company;
- Analysis of the company's main export markets;
- Acquire a thorough understanding of the company's business practices and its workplace.

In these four months my main task was to ensure that the sales pipeline was filled with qualified leads to the company. In addition, other responsibilities included conducting market evaluations, namely compiling a comprehensive report on the foremost interior designers within a specific country. This entailed collecting pertinent data regarding to

diverse aspects of the business and its professionals, with the ultimate goal of establishing prospective collaborative alliances through future communication.

The first chapter presents various perspectives from established authors about the concept of culture. Additionally, it explains the scope of culture within the corporate setting and underscores its significance in contemporary business practices. Then, it addresses the concept of interculturalism, recognizing the value that this cultural approach has in understanding the importance of having so many different perspectives but, above all, appreciating them. It places particular emphasis on the pivotal role of intercultural communication, which is essential for an organization like Covet Group that engages with clients from diverse global backgrounds. Additionally, it points to the significance of cultivating intercultural competence among employees as a valuable asset for the company.

The second chapter will dive into the definition and characteristics of luxury, intertwined with the craftsmanship in Portugal and the high-end furniture market as it is related to the host entity. Consequently, an analysis of the company's global presence and industry will be conducted, encompassing its historical background, significant achievements, and overall corporate framework.

In the third chapter, we will explore two important theories from two prominent authors in the subject of cross-cultural analysis, Geert Hofstede, and Edward T. Hall. By utilizing their frameworks, we will go into a comprehensive analysis of how these frameworks may serve as valuable tools for enhancing interactions with diverse countries and cultures. Furthermore, this analysis will establish a link between Covet's corporate structure and the aforementioned theories. Additionally, practical examples and comparisons from other countries will be provided to illustrate the use of these ideas.

The last chapter of this report provides a comprehensive overview of my position at Covet Group, more precisely the work made in two of its brands, Luxxu and PullCast. This chapter will explain the specific responsibilities and duties I undertook throughout my time in the company, detailing the software and resources I utilized to do my daily activities as well. Furthermore, it will describe the ways in which these tasks contributed to my learning experience and highlight both personal and professional accomplishments, along with the obstacles faced within a diverse and complex organizational environment.

CHAPTER I – INTERCULTURALITY IN THE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

“Experiencing different cultures is one of the best things a human being can do. It puts your whole world into perspective.” – Stephanie Gilmore

The upcoming chapter will explore the concept of culture, encompassing both its broader implications and its specific manifestations within corporate environments. Moreover, the chapter will address interculturalism acknowledging how cultural perspectives interact and influence one another as well as the concept of intercultural communication, a pivotal skill in the realm of intercultural competence highlighting its relevance in the dynamic realm of the business world.

1.1 Culture

It is difficult to define culture as an entirely objective concept. The term is interpreted in various ways and from various perspectives. According to Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952, p.181):

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, and on the other as conditioning elements of further action.

A simpler definition is provided by Kroeber (2002) as the shared customs, values, and knowledge of a social community. It includes language, religion, the arts, and the law, among other things, and influences the manner of life of its members. Based on this definition, culture plays a fundamental role in shaping individual and collective identities, fostering a sense of belonging, and influencing social interactions and behaviour within a community. Each person is born into a certain cultural context, which inherently shapes their development and influences the acquisition of cultural traits. Culture is established upon a shared foundation of heritage. (Singh K. R., 2020)

Paul, et.al. (2006) offers another perspective on the implicit concept of culture arguing that individuals from diverse origins are often exposed to particular traditions, heritages, and customs that are specific to their own cultures. These cultural influences play a significant role in shaping their moral standards, beliefs, and behaviours. For that

reason, cultural diversity fosters divergent perspectives on notions of morality, acceptability, and ethics. Essentially, culture establishes general norms for what constitutes appropriate conduct in a variety of settings. It shapes the values we attribute to various situations, which in turn affects our relationships and socialization with other members of society. (Singh, et.al., 2005)

Values are considered to be the fundamental component of culture, as they hold a broad spectrum of preferences for certain conditions or situations. These values significantly influence the dynamics of relationships within a society, as they are an integral part of the collective mindset of its people. (Hofstede, 2007) What is acceptable for one person can be unacceptable for another; it is all determined by a person's values.

In the international business world, comprehending and accepting cultural diversity is vital to foster successful business interactions. Therefore, management practices are subject to the influence of cultural values. To ensure effective communication and overall success, it is crucial to integrate diverse corporate cultures. Therefore, multinational companies must consider the role of culture in coordinating operations.

1.2 Corporate Culture

Following the definition of what is culture we can adapt it to the corporate environment, as suggested by Molenaar, et al. (2002, p.19) “Corporate culture is defined as the beliefs, values and behaviours that are consistent among all members of the corporation.”

“Culture is a late addition to the management vocabulary it only gained general acceptance in the 1980s. By now, however, it has become as firmly established as a management term as, for example, strategy, structure, or control.” (Hofstede, 1989, p.390)

Adapting the concept of culture to the corporate environment means understanding the shared behaviours, beliefs, and knowledge within a company. The corporate culture reflects the collective values and practices of its employees, shaping the company's identity and influencing its performance.

NATIONAL CULTURE **—————>** **CORPORATE MANAGEMENT CULTURE**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religion • Social organization • Language • Power distance • Collectivist-individualistic • Masculinity-femininity • Uncertainty avoidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General management style • Decision making • Staffing • Controlling • Time management • Employee motivation • Role of religion in the workplace
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Table 1 - National Cultures influence on Corporate Management Cultures

Source: Adaptation from Khan & Panarina, 2017

In management literature, "culture" encompasses both individual cultural identity and organizational contexts. Nevertheless, organizational cultures are distinct from one's culture identity. Individuals can choose to join an organization, but they cannot alter their nationality. This distinction emphasizes the complex structure of organizational cultures, which are shaped by the voluntary participation and shared values of their members, in contrast to the inherent and permanent nature of national cultures. (Hofstede, 1994)

Corporate culture can be influenced by a number of factors, including the company's mission and vision, leadership style, communication practices, reward systems, and work environment. (Mandal, 2002) The world's best-run businesses all have their own unique cultures that contribute to their innovative strategies and sustained leadership. (Schwartz & Davis, 1981) The success of a business is not accidental but is the result of excelling in specific tasks. Companies that prioritize corporate culture often invest in initiatives such as employee training and development, diversity and inclusion programs, and employee engagement activities. (Molenaar, et.al, 2002)

According to Ashworth (2015), a strong corporate culture offers numerous advantages that positively impact the organization's overall performance and success such as:

Improved Communication and Collaboration: by having a strong corporate culture, the organization promotes a good communication channel, enabling employees to work together and towards the same goal.

Shared Vision and Mission: A well-defined corporate culture ensures that all employees share a common vision and understand the organization's mission, which creates a strong sense of identification and belonging among employees and motivates them to work together.

Enhanced Mutual Trust and Cooperation: Corporate culture establishes the workplace environment for employees, a respectful and trusting workplace promotes harmony which influences their motivation and performance. When employees appreciate the company's culture, they are more likely to excel in their positions. (Molenaar, et. al, 2002)

Goal Achievement: A strong corporate culture reduces complexity and guides employees, providing understanding in what is required of them to contribute effectively, which consequently leads to faster task execution and easier achievement of business goals.

Reduced Employee Turnover: A positive corporate culture contributes to higher employee satisfaction and engagement. As a result, there is a reduced turnover rate.

1.2.1 Managing culture differences in multinationals

Multinational corporations with different employee backgrounds require the management of cultural differences in order to create harmony between employee expectations and corporate norms. (Tutar, et.al, 2014) Having a strong and positive corporate culture becomes an essential element to the success of an organization. It can contribute to the prosperity of a business, cultivate a positive work environment, and foster a sense of community and belonging among employees.

The interaction of national and organizational cultures can either facilitate or hinder communication therefore it must be dealt with cautious and expertise. For example, people of diverse cultural backgrounds do not always think or behave in the same manner, or even at the same speed thus, miscommunication and confusion is likely to rise in situations when the organization requires clarity. On the other hand, workforce

diversity means a wide range of opinions and ideas which enables creativity, flexibility, and more tolerance. (Miroshnik, 2002) It is critical to consider this weaknesses and strengths when assessing communication in international business relationships. Additionally, for international relationships with partners with different cultures or joint operations with hybrid ownership structures to be operated effectively, companies must understand and adapt the elements that influence communication patterns between partners, adapting these differences where necessary. (Griffith, 2002)

Multinational organizations with diverse operations should consider cultural differences when designing their structure. On that account, the purpose of cultural diversity management is to establish a work environment in which individuals from a variety of cultural backgrounds are encouraged to contribute their full talents to the company's success. (Tutar, et.al, 2014) According to Miroshnik (2002) to manage relations between multicultural organizations and the cultural environment, it is a question of proper perception, diagnosis, and adaptation since strategies, structures, and technologies that work in one cultural setting might not work in another. A company that shows cultural awareness, benefits from a better communication and stronger teamwork, ultimately contributing to the overall success of the organization in the global market. (Hofstede, 1989)

For this reason, cultural awareness has become one of the subtle but critical factors of competition and a powerful tool that contributes to the success of managing different cultural backgrounds in a company. One of the most essential goals of enterprises is to maximize their employees' skills. This necessity leads to an intellectual, emotive, and intuitive sense of leadership that sees cultural differences as an opportunity rather than a threat. (Tutar, et.al, 2014) Companies that excel in understanding and respecting cultural differences gain a distinctive advantage over their competitors. Such organizations are better equipped to navigate the complexities of global business, build positive relationships with diverse customers and partners, and adapt their strategies effectively in different cultural contexts.

1.3 Interculturalism

Nowadays “Cultures can no longer be understood as independent entities, but need to be contextualized in terms of social, political, and communication-based realities.” (Abdallah-Preteille, 2006, p.475) Interculturalism emerges as an updated version of multiculturalism in order to understand cultural diversities and realities. Tolerance between cultures is the foundation of multiculturalism, but multicultural spaces are not always open thus interculturality implies openness in a spatial logic of contact and dynamism. (Sarmiento, 2015)

In the following table is summarized how interculturalism tackles the weaknesses that multiculturalism presents in contemporary societies.

Multiculturalism Limitations	Interculturalism solutions
Multiculturalism stresses typologies and categorizations.	Interculturalism emphasizes mutations, fusions, and relations.
Encourages members of different cultures to live separately in parallel communities that have only minimal contact and interaction.	Places a central emphasis on intercultural dialogue, interaction, and exchange.
Political-ideological study, focusing both on the dominant or host society, and on the migrant or minority groups.	Hermeneutic option, an epistemological approach.
Different cultures must avoid conflict and respect each other.	Different cultures must learn to live together and enrich each other
Keeps stereotypes and prejudice	Tries to eradicate stereotypes and prejudice

Table 2 - Comparison of Multiculturalism Limitations and Interculturalism Solutions

Source: (Sarmiento, 2022)

In this sense, interculturalism evolves from multiculturalism, building upon its foundational principles while confronting its limitations.

According to Abdallah-Preteille (2006) Interculturalism emphasizes the processes and interactions that unite and define individuals and groups in their relationships. It's about knowing and understanding different cultural pragmatics, or how culture is made in complicated settings, to encourage cultural renewal and the development of cultural awareness acknowledging constant changes, rather than adaptation and conformity.

Interculturalism's benefits extend far beyond celebrating diversity and fostering a more inclusive and accepting society. It promotes **cultural exchange** between individuals from different backgrounds recognizing “multiple cultural influences that shape individuals' sense of self” (Yogeeswaran, et. al, 2021) which contributes to fostering appreciation for cultural diversity and heritage; **Reduces prejudice** while promoting dialogue and exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences as a means to developing empathy and respect of different cultural norms and traditions; (Forgeard, 2023) and, **Improves conflict resolution** enhanced by a more dynamic view of identity and the promotion of cultural blending and fusion. (Yogeeswaran, et. al, 2021) This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of individuals' cultural backgrounds, thereby creating an environment that supports the recognition and adoption of harmonious and collaborative solutions to disagreements and conflicts.

However, to this cultural approach there is criticism as well. According to Barrett (2013) one problem with interculturalism is that it doesn't consider the structural problems that cultural minorities and migrants face. Intercultural dialogue won't be able lead to better mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect until these structural problems are dealt with and fixed.

Another challenging criticism that interculturalism deals with is individuals might claim to be open-minded and respectful of cultural variety, but only do so when it comes to certain cultures. In other words, an individual may hold good attitudes towards certain groups while simultaneously harbouring unfavourable views towards others. Ultimately, a more rigorous critique of interculturalism arises from the recognition that every dialogue is inevitably influenced by disparities in social status and authority among the individuals engaged in the discourse. Furthermore, those occupying positions of authority often establish the communication guidelines, which are typically influenced by their own cultural perspectives.

Notwithstanding these critiques, effectively dealing with them necessitates a transparent recognition of the obstacles and a fair and equitable response to them in order for interculturalism to be acknowledged as the best approach to coexisting in a world with so many different cultures. To sum up interculturalism, as its core, recognizes that diversity can be a source of strength and innovation, but also acknowledges the challenges and tensions that can arise when different cultures come into contact. And it emphasizes

the importance of communication, empathy, and mutual respect in navigating these challenges and building a more inclusive and cohesive society.

1.3.1 Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication also known as cross cultural communication is an essential part of interculturalism. Above all, it consists in the “communication between individuals from different national cultures. However, the field of intercultural communication has grown considerably since its early beginnings.” (Croucher, et.al, 2015, p.71)

As stated by Singh (2020, p.44):

Intercultural communication deals with wide range of problems that naturally appear within an organization or social context made up of individuals from different religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. It is sometimes called ‘cross cultural communication’. This seeks to understand how people from different countries and cultures act, communicate and perceive the world around them. With regard to proper intercultural communication, it studies situations and modes of interaction among people from different cultural background.

Communication serves as a vehicle to transmit the main elements of every culture (norms, beliefs, values, etc.) (Damanhour, 2018) and, intercultural communication emerges as the solution to the communication challenges that today’s global society with different and complex cultural characteristics may face. (Croucher, et.al, 2015)

The influence of culture in communication manifests itself in several manners. It determines the temporal aspects of interpersonal interactions, the proper settings for discussing specific themes, the spatial proximity between speakers, and the suitable tone of voice to be employed in relation to the subject matter. (Hall, & Whyte, 1960) Thus, having the capacity of a foreigner to interpret and decode information in accordance with the cultural communication practices of the host demonstrates that understanding the language and communication style of the host culture enhances environmental adaptation. (Singh K. R., 2020)

With globalization, intercultural communication is becoming increasingly important not only in personal contexts but also professional contexts. Businesses that

operate in multiple countries and deal with many different cultures must be able to communicate effectively with employees, customers, and partners in order to succeed.

According to Adamczyk (2017) companies operating on the global market should diagnose the culture of the nation and their specifications with whom they will have commercial partnerships in order to reduce the cultural component as well as build strategies taking in consideration those particularities.

To achieve effective intercultural communication, individuals must possess awareness of cultural norms, values, beliefs, and communication styles. Cultural diversity means variations in the modes of articulating thoughts, conveying emotions, and interpreting nonverbal signals. Failure to comprehend and acknowledge these differences may result in instances of misinterpretation or ineffective communication.

1.3.1.1 Obstacles for an effective cross-cultural communication in business

In order to demonstrate respect for social norms of a different culture, it is essential to acknowledge and comprehend the potential variations in practices.

The initial step to achieving effective intercultural communication is to avoid **ethnocentrism**, defined as "the natural tendency or inclination among all people to view reality from their own cultural experience and perspective." (Yamada & Marsella, 2013) As a result, individuals who are ethnocentric tend to engage in judgmental behaviour against cultures that don't conform to their own culture, thus managers must avoid ethnocentrism. Cultures need to be regarded as equal and given equal treatment. (Kei & Yazdanifard, 2015)

Stereotyping can also be an obstacle to cross cultural communication. Understanding differences can serve as a beneficial starting point however, individuals are unique and therefore, it is impossible to foresee a person's behaviour based on their nationality. (Compoint, 2018). Companies that stereotype may fail to truly understand their employees and partners from different cultural backgrounds which can cause complications in achieving a good teamwork atmosphere and consequently making business globally.

On top of that, companies must avoid common cultural conflicts in terms of **communication style and nonverbal communication** when establishing business relationships with other companies whose national cultural orientations are very different.

A real example to illustrate communication problems is the different communication styles used between countries such as Japan and the United States of America. On one hand a country that employs an indirect communication whereas the other a more direct type of communication. (Griffith, 2002) Direct communication is often valued in Western cultures, which mostly appreciate straightforward truthfulness in a business interaction, while in cultures where indirect communication is more prominent, typically in Eastern cultures, people often consider it impolite to communicate negative information directly, so diplomatic strategies and politeness when confronting a disagreement may be more beneficial. (Indeed, 2023)

The level of **formality** can also be problematic when conducting business. Western countries, such as Australia, are typically informal and view formality as a sign of inflexibility, whereas eastern countries, such as China, view informality as a lack of professionalism. Western cultures view conversations as an opportunity to exchange information in the quickest way possible to facilitate business, whereas eastern cultures view the conversation as the first stage in creating a relationship that then leads to business. (Compoint, 2018)

Moreover, in all aspects of face-to-face interaction, **nonverbal communication**, intricately connected with an individual's body language, also represents an important aspect of intercultural communication. Body language, which includes facial expressions such as smiling and frowning, eye contact, alongside physical gestures such as hand and head movements, and proxemics, which refers to the spatial distance between communicating individuals, is an expression and reflection of the cultural, linguistic, and cognitive dimensions of communication and must be dealt with caution. For instance, in Western societies, eye contact is related to honesty, while in other cultures, it is viewed as an invasion of privacy and even not acceptable between opposite sexes, according to Saudi society, for religious and social reasons. Additionally, greetings between people of different cultures can also lead to miscommunication. Saudis think it is acceptable to hold hands or kiss cheeks, whereas western societies may misinterpret this behaviour as excessively intimate. (Damanhour, 2018)

Accordingly, in order to establish global business relationships and to avoid potential misunderstandings and conflicts comprehending the counterpart's communication style and nonverbal communication it is fundamental. It not only enhances one's ability to convey ideas and messages effectively but also empowers them

to decipher the details embedded within communication. Ultimately, it contributes to forging enduring partnerships, promotes cooperation and helps to navigate the complex dynamics of the global market.

Ultimately, while exploring the concept of interculturalism and intercultural communication, questions arise as to how important it is to have intercultural competence within an organization and how it can be beneficial to stand out against other organizations in the global business context.

1.3.2 Relevance of intercultural competence in the business world

Nowadays, due to the rapid advancements and modernization of our world reaching others has become relatively simple, however establishing a mutually beneficial and enduring business connection is much more challenging and, therefore, requires profound understanding of several factors. (Cerqueira, et.al, 2021) Intercultural competence emerges as the capacity of an individual to effectively navigate and interact within diverse cultural contexts. (Leung, et.al, 2014)

Developing intercultural competence involves a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours. If an individual possesses cultural knowledge which reflects an understanding of their own culture as well as other cultures, has linguistic skills in other languages which improve verbal and nonverbal communication, understands of how global issues relate to local issues and demonstrates interpersonal or social behaviours, such as empathizing active listening, observing, and critical thinking along with an open-minded and non-discriminatory attitude towards individuals and their cultures respecting and appreciating their differences reveals intercultural competence fundamental to navigate the complexities that arise with globalization. (Barrett, 2012)

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE	
Expertise International work experience; Knowledge of the local market; Knowledge of the sector.	Strategic Competence Knowledge management; Organizational ability; Synergetic thinking; Ability to find solutions.
Individual Competence Self-motivated; Observing boundaries; Critically assessing own work; Wanting to learn.	Social Competence Ability to work in a team; Empathy; Tolerance; Leadership qualities.
Able to describe own and other foreign intercultural processes; Foreign language skills, previous intercultural experience.	

Table 3 - Fundamental skills of Intercultural Competence

Source: Adapted from Mayer, 2021

In business, “to be hybrid, to be international and to speak interculturality fluently, is to create power. The power of knowledge is the fundamental approach to reach money having money and knowledge is the epiphany of the globalized world” (Cerqueira, et.al, 2021) and, therefore, the benefits of recruiting candidates with intercultural competence and training employees to acquire it need to exist for the international success of a company. To achieve success in global marketplaces, enterprises must possess the capability to engage in efficient communication with consumers, partners, and workers hailing from many cultural contexts and to capability to comprehend and value cultural distinctions, as well as to engage in successful communication across these divergences.

According to Kornegay Intercultural competence has significant importance in the business world for various reasons (Kornegay, 2023):

Effective communication: Intercultural competence is critical for effective communication across cultural differences. Interculturally competent employees are able to actively listen, ask questions, and demonstrate empathy, respect, and understanding for diverse cultural perspectives.

Building relationships: An understanding and recognition of cultural norms and values fosters enhanced interpersonal connections with consumers, partners, and

coworkers hailing from varied cultural backgrounds which can lead to increased business opportunities and success.

Teamwork: Nowadays many companies have teams from different cultural backgrounds, thus intercultural competence contributes to help team members to understand and appreciate each other's cultural perspectives and to work together more effectively.

Improve Brand Image: Organizations that possess a recognized level of cultural competency tend to receive more favourable perceptions from both consumers and stakeholders, as it signifies a dedication to fostering diversity and inclusiveness.

Better decision making and conflict resolutions: A team that possesses cultural competence considers different perspectives and experiences of team members from various cultural contexts enhancing more informed and careful thought decisions, while the acknowledgement and appreciation of cultural diversity can contribute to the successful resolution of workplace issues inside companies.

Innovation and creativity: A culturally diverse team that is culturally competent can bring. has the ability to offer fresh and unique viewpoints in the context of problem-solving and decision-making fostering innovation and creativity.

Adaptability to globalization: Intercultural competence is the strongest tool to navigate different cultural norms, values, and business practices as it enables employees to understand, to adapt to local cultures and to build relationships with customers and partners in different markets.

To sum up, intercultural competence emerges as an indispensable ability for achieving success. Organizations that place a high value on intercultural competency are more prepared to engage in effective communication, foster meaningful connections, engage in joint efforts, and achieve success in global marketplaces.

CHAPTER II – THE INDUSTRY SECTOR AND THE COVET GROUP

The upcoming chapter will explore the definition and characteristics of luxury, intertwined with the craftsmanship in Portugal and the high-end furniture market. These topics are connected to the internship company, and therefore it will also be addressing the company's evolution, organizational and brand structure, and its mission and values.

2.1 Luxury segment

Luxury is defined as a state or condition of great comfort, extravagance, or refinement, as provided by expensive and beautiful possessions, surroundings, or food, or something enjoyable and often expensive but not necessary. (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023)

According to Ko, et. al, (2019):

A luxury brand is a branded product or service that consumers perceive to:

- 1) be high quality;
- 2) offer authentic value via desired benefits, whether functional or emotional;
- 3) have a prestigious image within the market built on qualities such as artisanship, craftsmanship, or service quality;
- 4) be worthy of commanding a premium price; and
- 5) be capable of inspiring a deep connection, or resonance, with the consumer.

There are several factors that appear to influence the consumption patterns of luxury items Individual consumer characteristics such as the desire for originality, uniqueness, and pride together with perceptions regarding luxury brands, such as country of origin, perceived economic value, and authenticity, even the dynamics inherent in romantic relationships had the potential to serve as a driving force behind consumer behaviour, particularly in the realm of luxury purchasing. (Ko, et.al, 2019)

The furniture business in Portugal is a flourishing sector characterized by a robust legacy and a longstanding commitment to producing high-quality craftsmanship. For generations, Portuguese artisans have been engaged in the production of furniture of exceptional quality, thereby establishing a rich tradition of woodworking and furniture craftsmanship inside the country. (Covet Group, 2023)

The industry has evolved over time, with many companies now incorporating modern design elements and production techniques while still maintaining a focus on traditional craftsmanship. Portuguese furniture makers are known for their attention to detail and use of high-quality materials such as solid wood, leather, and natural fibres. (Pengelly, 2023)

The industry is also known for its sustainability efforts, with many Portuguese furniture producers using environmentally friendly materials and production methods. In addition, the industry is committed to supporting local communities and preserving traditional crafts and skills. (Pengelly, 2023)

Overall, the craftsmanship furniture industry in Portugal is a growing sector that combines traditional craftsmanship with modern design and sustainability practices. It is an important contributor to the country's economy and a source of pride for Portuguese artisans and designers.

2.2 High End Furniture Market

The global luxury furniture market was valued at USD 23.71 billion in 2022 and is expected to reach USD 33.31 billion by 2030, expanding at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.57%. (Nitesh & Roshan, 2022)

The increase in consumer demand for aesthetically appealing and eco-friendly luxury products, the population migration from rural to urban areas and, consequently, increased consumer expenditure on high quality décor products, and the rise in awareness of international brands and trends in developing countries alongside the higher purchase power of individual in these economies are some of the factors that contribute to the growth of the luxury furniture market. (Fortune Business Insights, 2023)

A report issued by Business Research Insights (2023), in the current consumer-driven environment, the luxury high-end furniture market is undergoing significant changes to satisfy the needs of discerning consumers. A notable trend is the increasing demand for customization and individualization. In an era that celebrates individuality, consumers desire furniture that is uniquely tailored to their preferences and reflects their distinct style and tastes. To meet this demand, manufacturers have embraced the concept of bespoke luxury, allowing customers to participate actively in the design process.

Customers now have the freedom to choose from a variety of materials, coatings, and designs, allowing them to create one-of-a-kind items that reflect their personal aesthetic.

In parallel, there has been a profound shift towards environmental consciousness in recent years. Sustainable and eco-friendly practices have become important for consumers, and this sentiment is strongly reflected in the luxury furniture market. Buyers are increasingly drawn to furniture made from ethically sourced, eco-friendly materials and manufactured using environmentally responsible practices. Luxury furniture manufacturers have responded to this demand by adopting sustainable sourcing methods, exploring recycled materials, and implementing low carbon footprint production techniques.

Furthermore, technology has also shaped luxury high-end furniture. Consumers want items that combine luxury and innovation. Manufacturers are using cutting-edge technologies to meet this demand. Smart home features, wireless charging, and IoT connection allow furniture to communicate with other devices. This harmonic blend of traditional craftsmanship and cutting-edge technology improves the utility and ease of high-end furniture, appealing to a wider audience while maintaining elegance.

The European Union (EU) is a world leader in the segment of high-quality furniture. The sector is undergoing transformation, becoming export-oriented and concentrating on enhancing product quality, design, and innovation, (IAPMEI - Informação setorial, 2022) nevertheless, despite the promising trends that contribute to the potential growth of the sector, there are still some challenges to be addressed which, according to the European Commission (2023) are:

- Competition from countries with low production costs, over half of the EU's total furniture imports come from China, a market share that is expanding swiftly;
- Heavy reliance on innovation and design which makes the sector more vulnerable to weak protection of intellectual property rights. Additionally, boosting research and innovation also requires finance that is often inaccessible to SMEs.
- Aging workforce and a limited ability to attract young workers may lead to structural problems;
- Protectionist measures on international markets, EU furniture manufacturers must pay duties on both imports and exports of raw materials and finished goods

alongside higher operational costs due to strict environmental, sustainability, and technical standards.

Overcoming these challenges requires strategic foresight, adaptability, and a commitment to delivering premium craftsmanship and exceptional customer experiences.

In the high-end furniture market, Portugal is a minor nation with a limited domestic market when compared to larger economies. Therefore, the domestic demand for high-end furniture is not as robust, prompting manufacturers to focus on exports in order to tap into larger, more profitable markets abroad.

2.3 Covet Group: evolution through the years.



Figure 1 – Covet's Group Logo

Source: Covet Group, 2023

In 2003, a group of Portuguese entrepreneurs with a love for design created “Menina Design”. (Covet Group, 2023) The ambition to create a world-class luxury brand resulted in the foundation of the first official brand (Boca do Lobo), which provided creative and luxurious designs and soon established itself as a strong competitor in both the international and domestic markets.

Amândio Pereira is the Group CEO and majority shareholder, whereas Ricardo Magalhães is the creative director for Covet House, Cofounder of the group, and CEO of the Modern Design and Living Group encompassing both Luzzu (LX) and PullCast (PC) brands that are also part of the Covet Group.

Due to the rapid growth of the brand, in 2014, Covet Group was established as premium design firm that specializes in the creation and manufacture of high-end furniture, lighting, and accessories which includes brands such as Boca do Lobo, Luxxu, Maison Valentina, PullCast, etc. (Covet Group, 2023)

The Covet Group employs about 500 people, of whom 200 work in manufacturing, 50 in central services, and the remaining 150 in the fields of commerce, marketing, and design. (CPP-LUXURY, 2019)

Today, Covet Group is a worldwide premium design firm with a vast portfolio of luxury brands. The group continues to develop and grow, with the goal of producing high-quality, elegantly designed items for distinguishing clients worldwide. (Covet Group, 2023)

2.3.1 Covet Internationalization

Covet Group has undergone fast internationalization throughout the years, extending its global footprint. The company successfully distributes its premium design products to clients all over the world by leveraging a number of different channels, including a physical and online presence (Covet Town, group website and, also brand's individual website) innovative marketing, and a commitment to personalization and service. They use both conventional and online media to promote their luxury design products and establish their name across the world. Covet Group make efforts such as, displaying its premium furniture, lighting, and accessories to a worldwide audience, by creating **showrooms** in key cities across the world, including Paris, New York, and London. In addition, has invested in **production facilities in Portugal**, where its goods are developed and manufactured to the highest quality and craftsmanship standards. This allows the corporation to keep control over the manufacturing process and ensure that its goods fulfil the demands and expectations of customers worldwide. (Covet Group, 2023)

The Group implements many strategies to facilitate the sale of its products, such as (Covet Group, 2023):

- **A Global Distribution Network** establishing a presence in several countries through showrooms, physical stores, and partnerships with retailers which allows to efficiently contact customers in different regions and respond to the specific demands of local markets.

- **An E-commerce Platform**, the company has a significant online presence that enables customers to browse and purchase their products online from anywhere in the globe. The platform provides detailed product information, high-quality images, and secure payment options.
- **Presence in International Trade Shows**, including Maison et Objet in Paris and Salone del Mobile in Milan. These events attract professionals, designers, and potential buyers from around the world. By displaying their products at these exhibitions Covet Group obtains exposure and interest from a global audience.
- **Digital Marketing and Branding**, the company implements digital marketing strategies to enhance its global reach. They utilize social media platforms, content marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), and influencer collaborations to promote their products to a larger audience. In addition, they maintain a strong brand presence via consistent visual identity, storytelling, and engaging online content.
- **Customization**, the company provides customers with the opportunity to customize and personalize their products. They also collaborate with designers and clients to develop bespoke items that serve to particular preferences and project specifications.
- **And, lastly, International Partnerships and Projects**, they collaborate with international designers, architects, and hospitality groups on various projects worldwide. To broaden its services and reach new audiences, the company has formed partnerships collaborations with a variety of worldwide brands, designers, including Tom Dixon and Marcel Wanders.

By employing a combination of physical presence, e-commerce capabilities, strategic marketing, and a focus on customization and customer service, Covet Group effectively sells its luxury design products to customers worldwide. They leverage both traditional and digital channels to reach a global audience and position themselves as a leading brand in the luxury design industry.

2.4 Corporate Organization

2.4.1 Mission and Values

The mission of Covet Group is to “elevate design and craftsmanship” (Covet Group, 2023) by delivering a selected collection of premium design items and experiences that elicit emotions, create distinctive and memorable settings, and encourage clients to express their originality and personality. (Covet Group, 2023)

The group focus on creativity and excellence to innovate and present “out of the box” and distinctive designs recognized with high quality and exceptional level of service; It is committed to provide extraordinary products and experiences that meet the need and exceed the expectations of its customers. The Group values the artistry and expertise of skilled craftsmen and is committed to preserving traditional techniques and methods of production. Furthermore, the company strives to minimize its environmental impact while supporting local communities and economies. (Covet Group, 2023) Covet Group's mission and values reflect its commitment to delivering exceptional luxury design products and experiences that are creative, passionate, excellent, crafted, and sustainable.

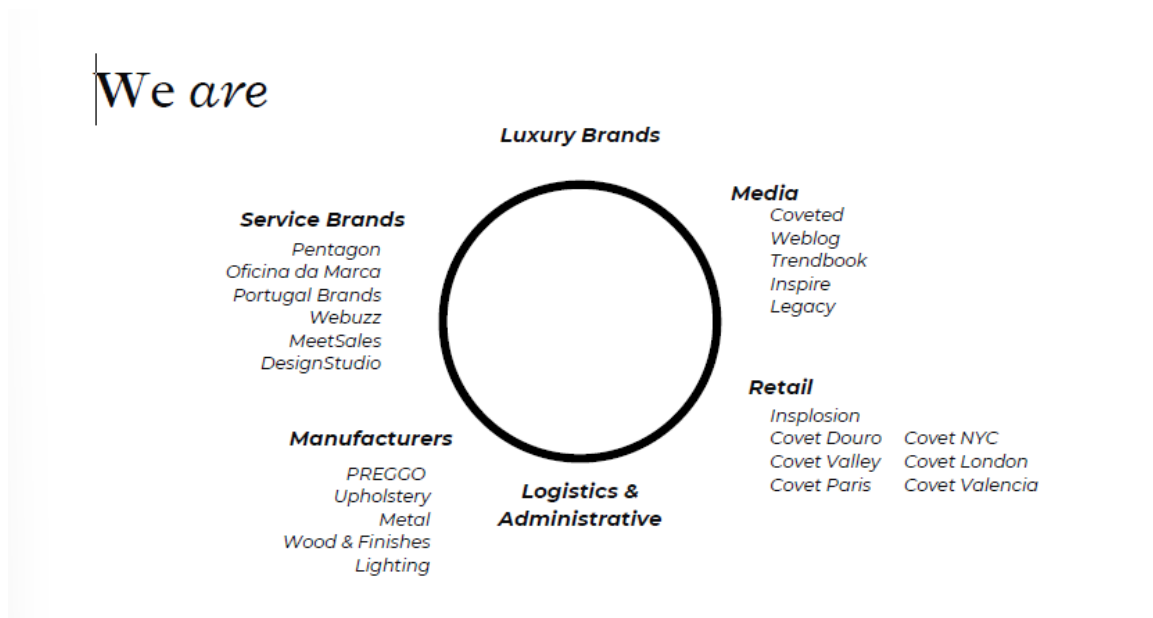


Figure 2 - Covet Group Corporate Organization and partnerships.

Source: Covet Group, 2023

As represented in the image, Covet Group maintains not only a design studio, but also a number of other external partnerships, (Oficina da Marca, PENTAGON, etc.) so that each of its brands can depend on a design & management that is unique and compatible with its desired aesthetic.

The company's communication is carried out via weekly newsletters with brand-specific subjects (WeBlog), in addition to a strong social media presence achieved through consistent visual identity, storytelling, and engaging online content. Coveted, for instance, is a magazine that addresses related topics within the luxury design industry. The group invests in digital marketing strategies to enhance its global reach and collaborates with a number of media departments (TrendBook, Inspire, Legacy, etc.) that provide customized services to the business if necessary.

Known for its craftsmanship, the group is proud to be a part of all the brands' production. It counts with manufacturing facilities, such as PREGGO or Upholstery, located in the north of the country to support all the production and meet the needs of a wide variety of customers and brand specifications.

The company operates showrooms—the Covet Houses—located in key design cities around the world, (including, Portugal, New York, London, Paris, and Valencia). In these immersive showrooms customers are able to interact with the products while getting a deeper comprehension of the brand's design philosophy and craftsmanship becoming an essential touchpoint for consumers to experience its products firsthand. (Covet Group, 2023)



Figure 3 – Showroom Covet Group in Porto

Source: Covet Group, 2023

2.4.2 Initiatives

Covet Group has launched a number of programs and initiatives that reflect its dedication to originality, innovation, sustainability, and social responsibility like Covet International Awards, an award ceremony for the world's best design and products ideas. The awards are intended to recognize creativity, innovation, and craftsmanship in different design categories, such as interior design, product design, and architecture. (Covet Awards, 2021)

The group established Covet Foundation a non-profit organization that promotes traditional craftsmanship, art, and design. The organization funds educational initiatives including workshops and exhibits the heritage and techniques of master artisans and craftsmen. (Covet Group, 2023)

Additionally, Covet Group implemented a sustainability program to reduce its environmental impact and promote sustainable practices in all its operations and supports a number of charitable projects in partnership with organizations such as the Make-A-Wish Foundation and Amor e Partilha to help underprivileged children and families and promote education and healthcare. (Covet Group, 2023)

2.5 Covet Town

The idea is to build a design-city with 80,000 m² in Oporto, Portugal. The company plans to invest \$50 million creating a hub for design lovers and a home for its estimated 2,500 employees. The main goal is to combine different creative working spaces, from design studios, marketing strategy players, media, and editorial teams, to the production facilities and the artisans who shape the product itself. (Covet Group, 2023)

The project is already in motion and brands like Boca do Lobo, DelightFull, BRABBU, Luxxu moved their headquarters, services, and factories to the new Covet Town.

2.6 Brands Organization

As previous mentioned, within The Covet Group company there's around eleven luxury design brands. Boca do Lobo is the original and most prominent brand,

nevertheless, the company created and administers some of the most well-known design brands, including Delightfull, BRABBU, Essential Home, Maison Valentina, Luxxu, Circu, Rug'Society, Pullcast, Caffe Latte, and Covet House. The group's brands are categorized according to the types of furniture they sell (Covet Group, 2023):

BRABBU, Boca do Lobo, and Essential Home all offer the same products: upholstery, case goods, and decorative pieces; however, each brand has a distinct aesthetic. BRABBU, for instance, focuses on contemporary designs influenced by nature; Boca do Lobo provides a more exclusive and personalized design; and Essential Home focuses on more classical, mid-century furniture.

DelightFULL, a retro-inspired lighting brand, is specialized in lighting fixtures, as is Luxxu, which provides more luxury and modern lighting designs.

Maison Valentina provides luxury bathroom furniture, including bathtubs and sinks. Circu creates furniture with brighter, more entertaining designs, especially for children and teens.

On the other hand, Rug's Society and PullCast were created to fulfil the lack of certain decorative items, specializing in items such as rugs, fireplaces, knobs, and door hardware, respectively.

Ultimately, Covet House develops personalized design projects for interior designers, architects, and design enthusiasts. Whereas Caffe Latte adapts all the brand's designs to a more neutral and minimalist design and colour palette. (Covet Group, 2023)



Figure 4 - Covet Group brands.

Source: Covet Group, 2023

Under the Covet Group umbrella, each brand operates autonomously, with its own team of designers and artisans devoted to delivering excellent products to clients all over the world and, also, the marketing, and sales departments are often established for each brand separately, but they work closely together to exchange resources, knowledge, and ideas, allowing the group to provide its clients with a varied selection of services and premium products and experiences.

CHAPTER III – COVET GROUP CULTURAL MODEL

The next chapter will discuss two major theories in the field of intercultural business management, namely Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Edward T. Hall's Low & High context Theory. Furthermore, an analysis and comparison will be conducted between the countries worked on during the internship as well as and the case of Covet Group as a company with its own culture.

3.1 Hofstede’s Cultural dimensions

Geert Hofstede was a well-known social psychologist who conducted a comprehensive study of how values in the workplace are influenced by culture. Hofstede’s research provides valuable insights into many cultures and their differences. When comprehended and used effectively, this information has the potential to decrease one's level of stress, anxiety, and concern in cross-cultural interactions with individuals from different nations.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions are a useful tool for understanding and comparing cultural differences across different countries and regions and there are several key aspects to assess in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the theory's applications.

Hofstede's Cultural dimensions encompass six concepts:

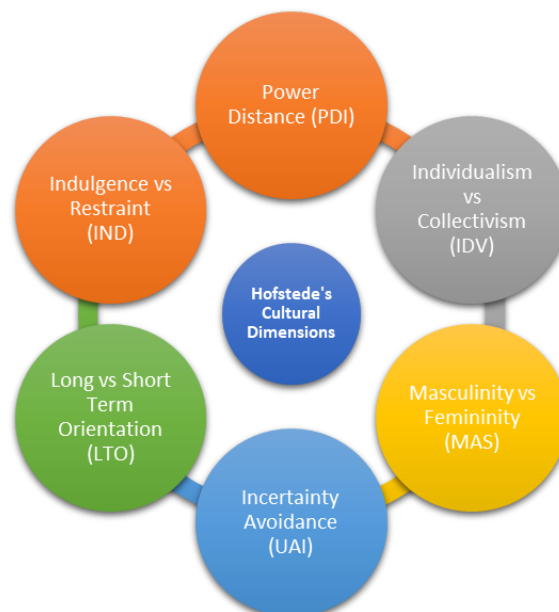


Table 4 - Hofstede's Six Cultural Dimensions

Source: Own elaboration

PDI: This dimension measures the extent to which people in a culture accept and expect unequal distribution of power in society and organizations (Hofstede, 2011) meaning how well cultures tolerate inequality. (Huang & Sternquist, 2007) In cultures characterized by high power distance there is greater acceptance of authority and hierarchy where in cultures with low power distance, people tend to be more equal. Managers in countries characterised by high degrees of power distance have the major corporate decision-making authority. (Khlif, 2016)

IDV: “Individualism on the one side versus its opposite, collectivism, that is the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups.” (Hofstede, 2011) In societies characterized by individualism, people prioritize individual achievement, personal goals, the well-being of their closest family members instead of the collective goals of a group or society. (Hofstede, 2011). Professionally speaking they are more focused in free-competition and leadership. (Huang & Sternquist, 2007) In contrast, in collectivistic cultures individuals are affiliated with "groups" that assume responsibility for their well-being in return for their allegiance. (Hofstede Insights, 2023) People tend to value teamwork, loyalty, and group harmony.

MAS: This metric assesses the degree to which a culture values traditionally masculine traits (assertiveness or competitiveness) or feminine traits (nurturance). (Huang & Sternquist, 2007) In cultures with high masculinity, there is a greater emphasis on achievement, competition, and material success, while in cultures with high femininity, there is a greater emphasis on caring for others, quality of life, and work-life balance. (Hofstede Insights, 2023)

UAI: How well societies tolerate or avoid uncertainty and ambiguity is reflected along this metric. (Hofstede, 2011) Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance tend to be less open to change and innovation, individuals are less likely to take risks and more likely to value stability, structure, and rules. Cultures with low uncertainty avoidance, people tend to be more venturesome and take more risks. Firms from a low uncertainty avoidance are more likely to enter and explore new and ambiguous circumstances. (Huang & Sternquist, 2007)

LTO: This measure indicates the extent to which a culture prefers a long-term approach, i.e., a pragmatic strategy that encourages thrift and modern education as a way to prepare for the future, versus a short-term approach, which reflects maintaining time-

honoured traditions and norms while viewing societal change with suspicion.. (Hofstede Insights, 2023) In cultures with high long-term orientation, people tend to value perseverance, thrift, and sustainability, while in cultures with high short-term orientation, people tend to value immediate gratification, respect for tradition, and social obligations. (Hofstede, 2011)

IND: “The last dimension is defined as the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses, based on the way they were raised.” (Hofstede Insights, 2023) Societies characterized by indulgence allow the free accomplishment of fundamental and natural human inclinations associated with the pursuit of pleasure and leisurely activities. Restraint refers to a societal construct that governs the indulgence of desires and enforces this regulation via the implementation of rigorous social standards. (Hofstede, 2011)

The Cultural dimensions theory offers a structured framework for the purpose of comparing and analysing cultural values and behaviours throughout other countries. It is important to note that while analysing the cultural dimensions and compare it to different cultures/societies/organizations this "dimensions" of culture are more like "tendencies" that may help in identifying cultural differences and possible difficulties in intercultural relations than "absolute" qualities of a culture. (Hofstede Insights, 2023) This theory facilitates a deeper understanding of the influence of these societal aspects on many elements such as communication, business practices, leadership styles, and other related areas. By acknowledging and comprehending these cultural differences, individuals and organizations may enhance their ability to manage cross-cultural interactions and build stronger relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds.

3.1.1 Hofstede Cultural Dimensions: Comparative analyses between China, India and United States (US)

A comparative analysis of the countries that have been the primary focus of the internship: China, India, and United States (US) will be undertaken utilizing Hofstede's cultural dimensions. The objective is to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the key cultural aspects that separate these countries and to acknowledge that these key aspects can provide valuable insights that help to outline possible strategies for successful business interactions within these distinctive cultural contexts.

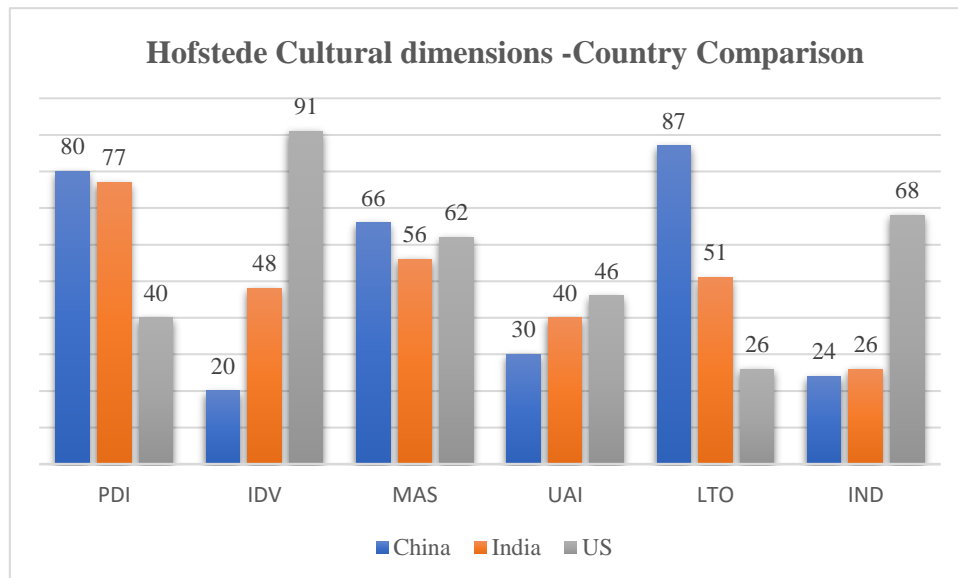


Table 5 - Country comparison between Chin, India and US, according to Hofstede Cultural Dimensions

Source: Adapted from Hofstede Insights, 2023

According to the graphic the eastern countries differ slightly in some dimensions, but we can see the bigger differences while comparing them with the western country, US.

In China sits in the higher rankings of PDI with India right behind (77). This, generally, indicates that individuals in these countries tend to be highly influenced by formal authority.

People in high power distance societies tend to obey the elderly and show respect towards authority figures. Chinese consumers' purchase decisions are highly influenced by opinion leaders and authority figures. (Singh et al, 2005). They conform to established authorities and favour top-down communication. (Paul et al, 2006) This highlights the tendency for business negotiations to exhibit a slower pace in China, as it is usual for individuals to seek authorization from higher-ranking executives within their companies prior to proceeding with procurement activities. In contrast US, shows the lower PDI score which supports the idea that a selected leader, team, or any individual can make decisions quickly and autonomously.

Asian cultures are examples of high-collectivist cultures (China, 20) whereas U.S. (91) and Western European cultures are typically low in collectivism. More or less in the centre we have India with an individualism index, of 48. In collectivist societies is essential to maintain good relations with stakeholders including shareholders, customers,

and business associates. (Paul et al, 2006) This highlights the tendency to create trusting and reassured business relationships with countries like China and India. In the US, such an individualistic culture values personal accomplishments and goals. Therefore, when approaching them, highlighting how the product or service can contribute to their individual success or how it aligns with their personal and organizational goals might be a successful way to make business.

Analysing the results of the Masculinity Index it is evident a clear trend toward a more masculine culture in all three nations. It is highly likely that members of more masculine societies choose products based on their satisfaction and whether the purchase itself accomplishes their utilitarian value. They put more value on the practical aspects of a brand when building trust and emotion toward it. (Hur et al, 2015) Thus in countries with more masculinity characteristics it is important to emphasize how the products can help the business partners achieve a sense of accomplishment of a utilitarian gain and competitive edge to boost business.

Based on the graphic uncertainty avoidance is mostly lower in the three countries. In a society with lower uncertainty avoidance, customers may be more open to acceptance for new ideas, innovative products, and a willingness to try something new or different. Adherence to laws and rules may be flexible to suit the actual situation and pragmatism is a fact of life. Nothing has to be perfect nor has to go exactly as planned. (Hofstede Insights, 2023) When conducting business in countries like the US, China, and India, which are more inclined to a lower uncertainty avoidance type of culture recommended approach would be focus on promoting innovation. These cultures typically have a greater tolerance for risk and ambiguity. Thus, demonstrating how creative solutions may provide new chances and competitive advantages will enhance business in such circumstances.

In the long-term orientation index China has the higher score (86) whereas US the lowest (26). India is in the centre with a score of 51. Long-term cultures value long-term relationships. Trust is a fundamental aspect of long-term partnerships, so when there is brand trust, it increases the potential that customers will stay loyal to the company over the long term. (Hur et al, 2015)

To engage in business with a long-term orientation culture like China prioritize the development of lasting relationships and prove dedication to the partnership for an extended period is fundamental. Whereas when dealing with a country like the US, where

short-term orientation is higher, it's important to emphasize quick, real results. Showing how the product offers immediate benefits or emphasizing how it boosts efficiency and production attracts this type of culture to business.

The long-term orientation goes in line with the indulgence index. China and India present a higher long-term orientation and a lower indulgence index (24 and 26), respectively, which means that they present cultural characteristics that are more restrictive and conservative. These cultures are characterized by values such tradition, collectivism, hierarchy, indirect communication etc. Therefore, when engaging in business with countries like India and China, it's vital to recognize and honour their cultural traditions and customs. Furthermore, prioritize the development of robust personal relationships where trust is often established slowly through meaningful interpersonal connections. (Ramnath, 2023)

3.1.2 Hofstede and Covet

Analysing and comparing the Covet Group using Hofstede's cultural dimensions some notable characteristics can be identified:

In terms of PDI, Covet Group is mostly characterized with a lower power distance. This is evident due to the absence of rigid hierarchical boundaries between employees and CEOs besides the decision-making processes within the company involve the participation of multiple individuals, rather than being entirely dependent on the authority of a single person. However, it is important to note that Covet Group does demonstrate higher differentials in terms of salary and responsibility.

Regarding IDV metrics, Covet Group may be categorized in two distinct manners: firstly, by considering each brand individually, and secondly, by considering the company as a whole group. Within each brand the company there is a collectivist orientation. Employees tend to show teamwork, loyalty, and group harmony to achieve collective goals. However, overall, the group exhibits individualistic characteristics as there is a presence of self-interested competition among the brands in order to achieve the best-selling results for the group. The employees are more concerned in prioritizing their particular achievements within the context of their personal brand.

In relation to the UAI measure, Covet Group does not exhibit similarities when compared to its country of origin, which has the highest score in this regard. The firm

exhibits a low level of uncertainty avoidance, which may be attributed to its global operations. As a result, the company places importance on openness, innovation, and fostering a venturesome mindset to effectively navigate the diverse marketplaces in which it works.

As for LTO Covet Group exhibits a more tendency for long-term orientation. The company acknowledges the necessity of implementing changes to effectively respond to the dynamic shifts in contemporary markets demonstrated by a commitment to sustainability processes. However, there appears to be a lack of alignment between the training sessions provided and the current challenges faced by employees. This misalignment may hinder long-term growth and development.

Ultimately the IND metric is shown to be declining in response to workplace transformations, mostly due to the absence of a conducive and employee-centric atmosphere. From a micro-level viewpoint, employees do not perceive adequate recognition for their job in terms of remuneration and higher levels of acknowledgement for their performance.

In conclusion, the majority of these characteristics facilitate the establishment and development of a conducive environment that fosters growth and profitability. However, there are still challenges such as:

- The company lacks effective employee motivation strategies and falls short in acknowledging and appreciating its staff adequately,
- There is noticeable competition among brands within the same group, which poses a challenge as they should ideally collaborate toward a common goal rather than inadvertently undermining each other's success.

The company must develop fresh strategies for staff motivation and recognition while simultaneously mitigating intra-group brand competition. Only through these measures can it pave the way for a more favourable environment, ultimately translating into sustained long-term gains,

3.2 Edward T. Hall Theory

Edward T. Hall was an acclaimed American anthropologist who made important contributions to the domain of intercultural communication. The researcher's primary objective was to comprehend the impact of culture on communication, specifically cross-

cultural communications. He believed that basic differences in individuals' perceptions of reality influenced by their culture played a significant role in causing miscommunications. (Brown, 2001)

One of Hall's most well-known contribution to the field is his theory of high-context and low-context cultures. "Context" encompasses the surrounding environment and conditions in which a message is sent. This includes factors such as historical background, existing information, utilization of pauses and silences, as well as assumptions about the other person's value. For that reason, the amount of shared context that is assumed between speakers affects how well they can communicate. (Dozier, et.al, 1998) According to this theory, certain cultures like to speak openly and explicitly (a low-context culture), while others prefer to keep their communications more private and implicit (a high-context culture). The cultural heritage of individuals influences their ability to comprehend messages and how to expose them. (Alizadeh Afrouzi, 2021)

Individuals from low-context cultures admire sincerity and directness. The majority of communication meaning is conveyed through words and explicit statements and the decoding of the message does not require consideration of the complex context. (Dozier, et.al, 1998) In contrast, high-context cultures are those in which a substantial part of the meaning of communication is embedded in the context, such as nonverbal signals, body language, and the relationship between the speakers. The communication is indirect and largely dependent on implicit understanding thus the recipient is expected to decipher the message's meaning based on its context. (Alizadeh Afrouzi, 2021)

LOW-CONTEXT CULTURES

HIGH-CONTEXT CULTURES

Disregard the situational context in the process of communication.	Disregard the dominant oral information.
Important information usually through explicit oral expression.	The important information is usually reflected in time, space, situation, relationship, and other situational clues.
Attaches great importance to the presentations and fluent language expression, like speech.	Highly emphasis on harmony and tend to use vague language and prefer silence.
Direct statement to his own opinion and tries to persuade the other to accept his point of view.	Not directly touch the key when speaking and avoid direct say "No".

Table 6 -Main characteristics from High/Low-context cultures

Source: Adapted from Zhu & Ma, 2015

Countries such as China, Korea, and Japan occupy the highest level of the continuum, while Switzerland and Scandinavian nations such as Norway and Sweden occupy the lower end. In the centre are France, Spain, Africa, and the Arab states of the Middle East. (Kim, et.al, 1998)

3.2.1 Edward T. Hall Theory: Comparative analyses between China, India and United States (US)

For Edward T. Hall a comparative analysis of the countries China, India, and US will be undertaken as well. Similar to Hofstede's cross-cultural comparisons, this research aims to identify the prevailing cultural style in each country and use this knowledge to assist with business negotiations.

According to Hall's research, the US is considered a society characterized by a low-context culture, whereas China is recognized as a society with a high-context culture. India appears to be in the middle. (Singh et.al, 2005) High- and low-context cultures has been widely adopted as a useful theoretical framework for determining differences between Western and Eastern cultures.

COMMUNICATION STYLE	
Western-Countries	Eastern-Countries
Extrovert, lively	Introvert, quiet
Forceful	Modest
Thinks aloud.	Thinks in silence.
Interrupts	Doesn't interrupt.
Countries Talkative	Distrust big talkers
Overt body language	Little body language

Table 7 - Differences in communication between Western and Eastern

Source: Adapted from (Nishimura, Nevgi, & Tella, 2008)

The above infographic compares and contrasts the communication styles of the western and eastern countries. To some extent, this is meant to illustrate how different their modes of communication are from one another, but it is not meant to be taken as an "absolute" description of any one culture.

China and India are viewed as high-context countries. Individuals hailing from such cultures prefer to avoid conflict and, they are not always straight-forward. (Singh, 2020) As a result, they adopt a more reserved and quiet approach when conducting business. This is yet more proof that close relationships between individuals need to be cultivated in such societies. These relationships are crucial to the success of many business deals and demonstrating cultural sensitivity is essential.

In addition, it is important to note that both Chinese and Indian cultures exhibit a strong respect for hierarchical structures inside businesses. When engaging in communication with individuals from both cultures, it is essential to demonstrate respect by acknowledging the positions and titles of counterparts. Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize that this adherence to hierarchy may result in a slower speed of business proceedings.

In the context of negotiation, it is crucial to recognize that Chinese communication style tends to be more indirect. Therefore, it is essential to be attentive to non-verbal cues and contextual factors during negotiations. On the contrary, Indians differ in their communication style from Chinese. India is heading for a higher dialogue-orientation and direct communication style. (Nishimura et al, 2008) Therefore being clear and transparent but also maintain politeness and respect might be the best way to deal with the Indian culture.

Despite the fact that no single society occupies the extremes of the spectrum. American culture is toward the lower end of the scale. The premise of low-context cultures is that there is always an objective truth that can be discovered by logic and reasoning. (Wang, 2008) In low context cultures, people are expected to speak clearly otherwise it would be considered dishonest or ineffective. (Singh C. , 2020) Thus, being straightforward in the message and interaction, avoiding ambiguity can be the best strategy to deal with American culture.

In low-context societies, status and responsibility can be independent of one another; direct questions are not intended to offend but to explain and achieve common goals. (Wang, 2008) Americans appreciate clear, concise, and direct communication as well as practical solutions that deliver results; therefore, providing all necessary information openly and honestly and enhancing efficiency, reducing costs, or increasing productivity is important to achieving business.

Differences in communication styles can have an impact on cross-cultural communication. To effectively engage stakeholders and promote genuine interactions, businesses need to possess strategies, tactics, skills, and cultural awareness. (Men & Tsai, 2012) By applying Hall's theory, businesses may develop a knowledge strategy that can be adapted for use across cultures and their varying levels of business interaction, as well as different communication styles.

3.2.2 Edward T. Hall and Covet

In relation to Hall's theory of Low or High Context, the covet group may be mostly identified as a culture that exhibits high-context characteristics. In general, the organization exhibits a dependence on implicit communication, shared traditions, and social cues.

In addition, Covet Group, similarly to the Portuguese culture, exhibits a tendency to avoid direct confrontation when addressing difficulties.

High-context societies focus on the pre-negotiation stage, it is important to work to develop a relationship with their counterparts. They prioritize a long-term orientation and work to preserve relationships beyond the negotiation. (Rudolf, 2019) For the Covet Group establishing a good relationship with their business partners is essential for conducting successful business negotiations. Trust is a crucial component in this regard therefore, fostering a personal connection between the business partners themselves, rather than only focusing on their respective enterprises, plays a pivotal role in cultivating trust.

High-context cultures tend to rely heavily on implicit communication. The person, and the context of the message both contribute to the meaning of the message thus nonverbal communication plays a crucial part in these cultures. Covet Group places a high priority on analysing all the signals and indicators present in a conversation to determine whether the other party is genuinely interested in conducting business. This careful approach entails not only listening to the words spoken, but also considering nonverbal communication, tone, and any contextual factors that may indicate the level of commitment and sincerity of potential business associates. This evaluation process demonstrates their dedication to making informed decisions and nurturing prosperous business relationships.

3.3 Hofstede's Cultural dimensions vs Edward T. Hall Theory

Both Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Edward T. Hall's theories are important frameworks in order to understand and compare the cultural differences across different countries and regions. Nevertheless, the theories diverge in some particular ways that reflect the different approaches of the authors in their attempts to comprehend the cultural subject matter.

For instance, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions focus primarily on the values and beliefs that underlie cultural differences. On the contrary Hall's theory focus more on the ways in which cultural differences are expressed in communication.

Hofstede's framework emphasizes many dimensions, such as power distance and individualism vs. collectivism, that reflect fundamental differences in how people from different cultures view authority, hierarchy, and individual vs. group goals whereas Hall's theory of high-context vs. low-context cultures, emphasizes the ways in which people from different cultures use nonverbal signals as a means of communication.

Another point of divergence is that Hofstede's approach involves the use of a survey questionnaire and the operationalization of culture into standardized scores, which allows for its application in quantitative research. In contrast, Hall's theories lack specific instruments and are primarily based on qualitative research methods and observations of cultural differences in communication. This implies that Hofstede's framework is characterized by a greater emphasis on quantitative analysis and statistical methods, whereas Hall's ideas tend to be more focused on interpretation and description. (Nakata, 2009)

Despite their differences, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Hall's ideas are both useful guides to negotiating international business relationships. It is important to have these cultural approaches in mind because something as elementary as verbal communication can be a problem when the two parties come from different regions. Individuals and organizations can develop stronger relationships and communicate more effectively with people of different cultures if they recognize and comprehend cultural differences.

CHAPTER IV – INTERNSHIP

The final chapter of this report will provide an overview of the internship experience at Covet Group, encompassing the first reception, the many activities undertaken, and the timetable followed during the internship period. Additionally, it will also assess the correlation between the internship and the master's program in intercultural studies for business, along with final considerations on the internship experience.

4.1 Welcome Covet Group

The internship took place in LX & PC. As previously mentioned, both brands are part of the MDL Group. The first started as a lighting brand but rapidly become a furniture brand, as well, with focus in elegant and luxurious designs where gold and crystal become its signature material. (LUXXU, 2023) PullCast, on the other hand, is a hardware brand that specializes in door handles, cabinet knobs, and other decorative hardware that combine high-quality materials, unique designs, and a commitment to sustainability. (PullCast, 2023)

The internship duration was from February 1st, 2023, to May 26th, 2023, with a total duration of 500 hours.

The internship was done under the guidance of the supervisor and leader of the sales team Ana Ribeiro alongside with her team. Before being introduced to my supervisor, the first day of the internship began with a tour of the building and a brief presentation by the HR manager (Catarina Ferro) on the functioning of the company. After that, I had a meeting with my supervisor, who introduced me to the brand's employees.

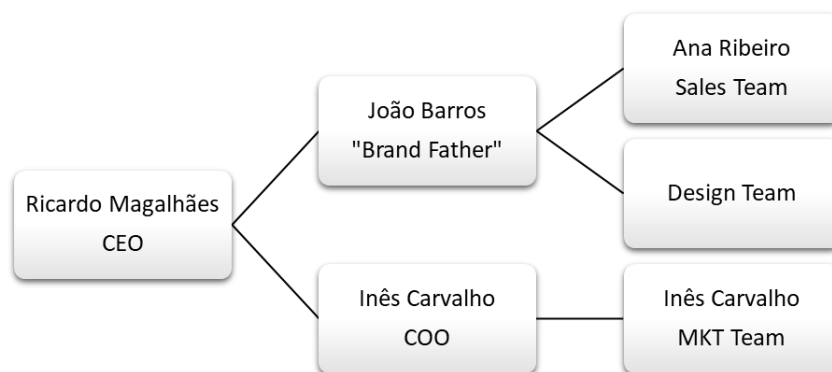


Figure 5 - Brand Organization: The Team

Source: Own elaboration

The operations conducted within the brands can be categorized into three primary groups: the design team, the marketing team, and the sales team.

The design team is responsible for creating the items according to the brand and by analysing the latest trends in interior design, materials, and colours. This involves sketching, 3D modelling, and prototyping. In addition, they work closely with suppliers to acquire high-quality and luxurious materials that meet the brand's standards, and they frequently analyse customizable products, evaluating if different finishes, fabrics, or sizes are adequate to meet the desires of the consumers.

Marketing is intended to address social networks such as Pinterest, Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn, etc. They are responsible for online advertising and promotion of the brand to attract potential customers. Some methods include updating the brand's blog, sending out newsletters with information about new products or events, and informing clients of appealing promotions. They are also responsible for responding to customers who request eBooks and marketing-related inquiries.

Lastly, the sales team is divided into two major teams: the sales developers (SD) and account managers (AM) and, the customer service representatives (CSR). The first two are responsible for product sales by replying to customers, establishing partnerships, and overall managing the whole selling process. The difference is the SD is only responsible for the first contact until the customer confirms the purchase and afterwards the AM stays responsible for customer follow-up, relationship development and future purchases. Ultimately, the CSR are responsible for handling post-sales requirements including deliveries, complaints etc.

4.2 The internship's schedule.

The following table provides a broad-strokes overview of the main tasks and the training process undertaken during the internship.

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
February	Introduction to the group; LX & PC brand organization.	Brands product formation	Data Analyses (Team, website etc.)	LX & PC Prices Updating;

March	CRM Salesforce formation.	Introduction to top markets, Market allocation.	Market analyses: ID Market in China: Best Companies	Lead Prospecting. ¹
April	Market analyses: ID Market in India: Best Companies	Contact Past Customers: Email Marketing	ISaloni Fair: Add customers to the database	ISaloni Fair: Reply to requests
May	ISaloni Fair: Client's Follow up	Lead Prospecting.	Lead Prospecting.	Report and Status of clients.

Table 8 - Development of activities in the Covet's internship

Source: Own elaboration

4.2.1 Trainee Process

In the first stages of the internship, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the brands LX and PC and its operational method, it was necessary to start with a theoretical overview of its product offerings, core values, and associated advantages. Over a period of three weeks, I was required to do structured training encompassing various learning tasks, both theoretical and practical in nature, as well as attending informative sessions conducted by different team members. In addition, I undergone daily tasks to understand better the functioning of the company, the teams, and the products. For. e. g., the introduction to the brands was done by exploring the different websites that the company has for each brand and without any previous knowledge of the brands, I was asked to give brief summaries of each one, their inspiration, style, and favourite pieces. After that is expected that the trainee work as a regular employee and, therefore, I receive an email address which enables access to all the necessary equipment and was required to attend meetings and take part in training including different products formations and seminars. This offered me the chance to feel fully integrated into the business.

Afterwards, I was introduced the *modus operandi* in the sales department. I was required to complete a training program in the salesforce platform.

¹ Lead prospecting: series of repeating operations that are performed within the defined markets. These tasks include profiling leads, responding to leads, conducting outreach and cold calling, following up with clients, and ultimately evaluating leads.

Salesforce is a cloud-based customer relationship management (CRM) program that aids organizations in managing their marketing, sales, customer support, and other related activities. Businesses manage all of their customer information, sales leads, marketing initiatives, and customer support interactions using the Salesforce platform, it provides a variety of tools and capabilities including analytics, automation, collaboration, and customisation. (Salesforce, 2023) A SD, sometimes referred to as a business development representative (BDR), has the responsibility of generating fresh leads and creating opportunities for the sales team. The main goal is to identify, assess and qualify potential clients.

The objective of this program was to enhance my understanding of various concepts like as Leads, Stakeholders, Opportunities, Pro-forms, Targets, and other associated terminologies. During my training, I acquired knowledge regarding the lead processing procedure, as well as effective email response strategies and the proper response in telephone conversations. Additionally, and in order to build trust and eventually deepen the business relationship, I needed to acquire knowledge of the lead's professional and personal interests.

4.3 Developed activities.

4.3.1 Lead Prospecting

Following the Salesforce training, I was assigned my initial market, China. Throughout the duration of my internship, I was also given the opportunity to work with clients in India, as well as collaborate with other sales developers in the United States of America and United Kingdom markets.

After being assigned a market, I was ready to work on it. The initial sales process starts with lead² prospecting and is very simple. The lead can come from several sources, such as the brand's official website, online platforms, direct chat interactions, social media platforms, or even press releases. Once the lead appears on the Salesforce program, it is assigned to the salesperson responsible for that specific market, and there is a time limit for replying to it.

² Lead: Contact information for a potential sale, whether an individual, company or organisation. Obtained from responses to newsletters, campaigns, website contacts and/or social media.

The initial step involves the qualification and need analysis of the client. This entails gathering comprehensive information about the client to enable the SD to evaluate whether the lead aligns with the company's offerings. The purpose is to determine the commercial potential of the lead and ascertain their professional expertise in the relevant field.

After that, the next step is responding to the client's request by providing the requested materials, which may include 3D files, product pricing, catalogues, product sheets, or additional information. It is where the SD introduces the company's products or services to potential customers; assess the level of interest displayed by the prospects; Arrange follow-up discussions to further engage with the leads. And, additionally, the SD interacts with the leads by posing specific questions aimed at comprehending their requirements, challenges, and purchasing intents. This process ultimately enables the SD to determine the suitability of the leads for further consideration.

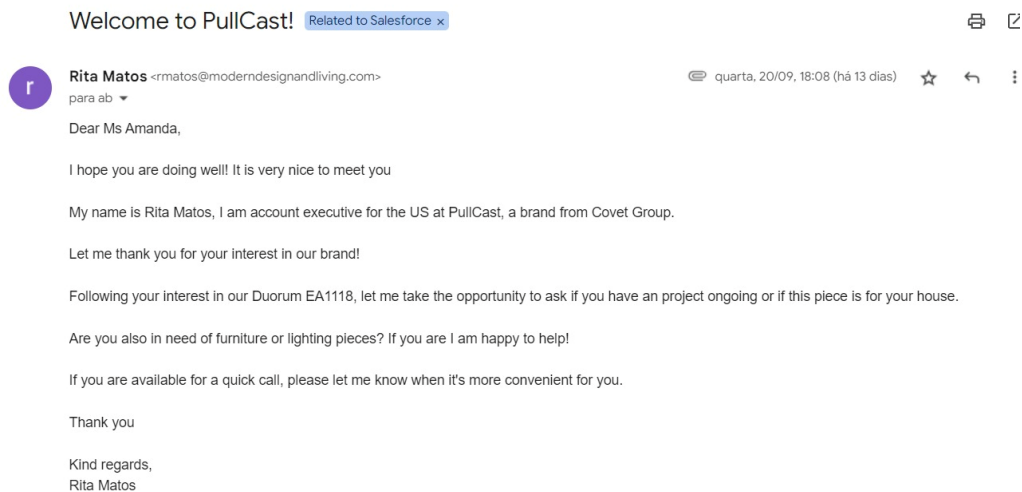


Figure 6 - Example of a reply email to a client

Source: Covet Group, 2023

The follow-up activities involve proactive outreach and cold calling, where the SD initiates outbound communication by contacting the potential customer through methods such as cold calls, emails, or messages on social media platforms. If the customer demonstrates commercial potential, a sequence of further actions will be undertaken. On the contrary, if the client fails to meet the necessary criteria, they will be classified as an unqualified client.

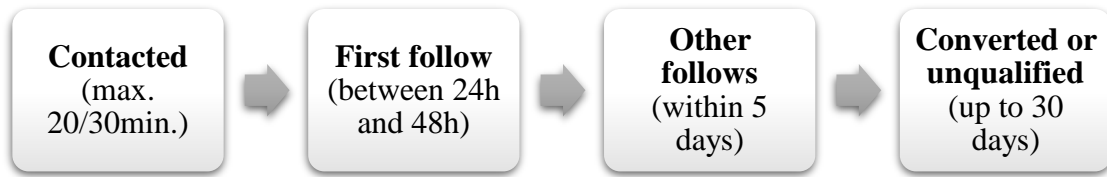


Figure 7 - The duration of contact time: when the lead first appears and when it is decided whether it is qualified or unqualified.

Source: Own elaboration

Once a lead has been determined to be qualified³, SD schedule appointments or demonstrations with the AM to coordinate and ensure that both the prospect's and the sales representative's schedules align for a productive meeting. Certain leads may not be immediately ready to make a purchase. In such cases, SD maintain regular communication, follow up on prospects' inquiries, provide additional information, and build relationships to keep the leads engaged until they are ready to move forward.

Alongside the sales process the SD update and maintain accurate records of leads, contacts, and activities in the company's CRM system, documenting relevant information and tracking communication history. All of this is conducted in partnership with the AM therefore it requires a continuous exchange of information regarding prospects, tactics, sales methods, lead quality, and ways to improve the sales process based on interactions with those leads.

4.3.2 Outreach and cold calling

During my internship, I engaged in outreach and cold calling, which provided me with valuable insights into client communication across diverse cultures and regions.

Communicating with Indian, Chinese, and US markets involves navigating distinct cultural, linguistic, and business differences. Here's an overview of some key aspects I noticed during some of the calls:

³ If the lead is evaluated as qualified, an opportunity is created, which is the object that corresponds to the current business opportunities with all the associated information (seller, quantities, products).

In India, English is extensively spoken, but there are also numerous regional languages and dialects. Occasionally, they did not comprehend and preferred their native language, making communication challenging. Establishing intimate relationships was also essential; thus, conversations about family, hobbies, and well-being may precede discussions about business (Often tasks that required a lot of time from our AEs). Consequently, the decision-making process was extensive, requiring consensus-building and multiple approval levels. It was essential to maintain a respectful and tolerant attitude.

In China, the official language is Mandarin. Most of the contacts weren't fluent in English being common to require translations and localization. Chinese culture places significant importance on formality, politeness, and timely delivery. However, due to the existence of different time zones, trying to maintain punctuality while contact can be challenging. Relationship-building is, also, valued and plays a vital part in the business process. Furthermore, the decision-making tends to follow a hierarchical structure, wherein the ultimate say typically resides with senior executives. This can hinder the efficiency of the process, since first contact is often established with individuals lacking decision-making power, acting as intermediaries.

Ultimately, in US, being English the primary language for business communication makes it an easier task compared to the other two markets. In addition, in American business culture, meetings and negotiations may focus on business matters without extensive socializing; the process is typically more direct and to the point. Compared to the Chinese market, for instance, American business culture tends to be more informal, as it is common to address colleagues by their first names. Additionally, decision-making can be faster, with decisions made by a designated leader or team.

I've learned a lot about lead prospecting, such as how to efficiently find new clients, create in-depth customer profiles, and rank leads in order of importance. This method has also helped me produce specialized content and personalized outreach in response to our clients' needs. In addition, I now know how to assess the effectiveness of my marketing and sales activities and how to use that data into my future interactions with customers.

4.3.3 Market Research

During the duration of my internship training program, I was assigned the duty of conducting research on renowned interior designers in China and India, as these two

countries were the primary focus of my professional activities. The objective of this study was to identify potential customers with whom we might establish commercial collaborations or partnerships.

To conduct a market study about the most renowned interior designers in both countries, I gathered information on various aspects of the industry and the professionals within it as represented in the table below.

INTERIOR DESIGN MARKET	Understand the interior design market, including its size, growth trends, and key drivers.
INDUSTRY TRENDS	Identify the latest trends and emerging themes such as sustainability, technology integration, and cultural influences.
KEY PLAYERS	Research and compile a list of the most renowned interior designers and design firms
PORTFOLIO ANALYSIS	Review the portfolios and past projects of the chosen designers to understand their style, specialties, and areas of expertise.
MARKET OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES	Identify potential growth opportunities and challenges within the interior design market, such as market saturation or changing consumer preferences.

Table 9 - Information aspects to adhere when conducting a market research for Covet

Source: Adapted from Covet Group, 2023

Conducting these market studies was an opportunity to gather valuable insights about the markets while deepened skills in research, market analysis, and communication. As the global economy continues to evolve, it is essential to understand the specific industries of these countries and the prominent names in the industry. This knowledge is vital for the development of cross-cultural competence and the effective execution of initiatives involving diverse cultures. Networking opportunities have arisen for the company and this task has substantially contributed to my personal and professional development.

4.3.4 Email Marketing

Another task carried out during the internship was the execution of email marketing. The company established a strategic approach to email marketing with the objective of re-engaging previous consumers. This involved sending targeted email campaigns to clients who had previously interacted with our brand, whether by making a purchase or signing up for our newsletter. The goal was to reconnect with these past customers and consequently motivate them to repeat a purchase or engaging with our latest offerings.

Email marketing allowed for highly targeted communication where I could tailor my messages to specific customer segments based on their past interactions and preferences. Nonetheless, achieving favourable responses from clients proved to be a challenging endeavour, with relatively low engagement rates.

4.3.5 The ISaloni Fair

As previously stated, the organization participates in trade exhibitions. The main goal of these events is to exhibit the latest offerings of the brand as well as create leads that provide financial gains.

The 2023 ISaloni fair also known as the Salone del Mobile is widely regarded as one of the most prestigious and influential international furniture and design exhibitions hosted annually in Milan. The event showcases a wide range of furniture, interior design, and home furnishings, featuring products from leading furniture manufacturers, designers, and architects from around the world. (Salone del Mobile, 2023)

During the fair, Covet Group establish stands to exhibit all their brands. These displays are designed with careful attention to detail, presenting a wide variety of the brand's most popular products alongside their most recent launches. The objective is to engage with potential customers and highlight the brand's products. To enter the stand, attendees must provide their contact information, demonstrating their interest in the brand. Once inside, AE selected to represent each brand greet the customers and provide a personalized experience, guiding them through the brand's offerings and providing information about the displayed products. Simultaneously with the fair, the Backoffice operations team carefully undertakes the task of gathering the attendee's contact information, which is then included into the brand's database. In addition, they are also

responsible for managing the products post-sale made by the AEs at the trade show, ensuring a seamless transaction experience for the customers.

In order to maximize client satisfaction and enhancing brand engagement is essential to maintain a great coordination and an effective strategy between the physical presence at the trade show and the office's data management operations

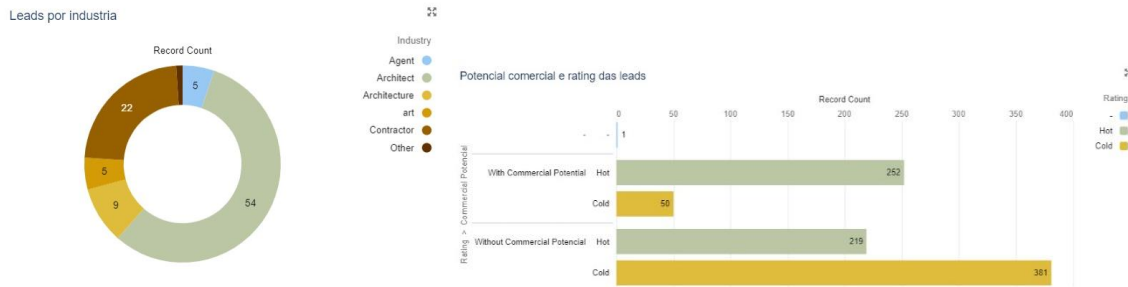


Figure 8 - Statistics from ISaloni 2023: Leads per industry and their commercial potential.

Source: Covet Group, 2023

MDL Group had a total of 903 leads, from these 302 were evaluated with commercial potential; the vast majority of the clients were interior designers and architects already familiar with the brand.

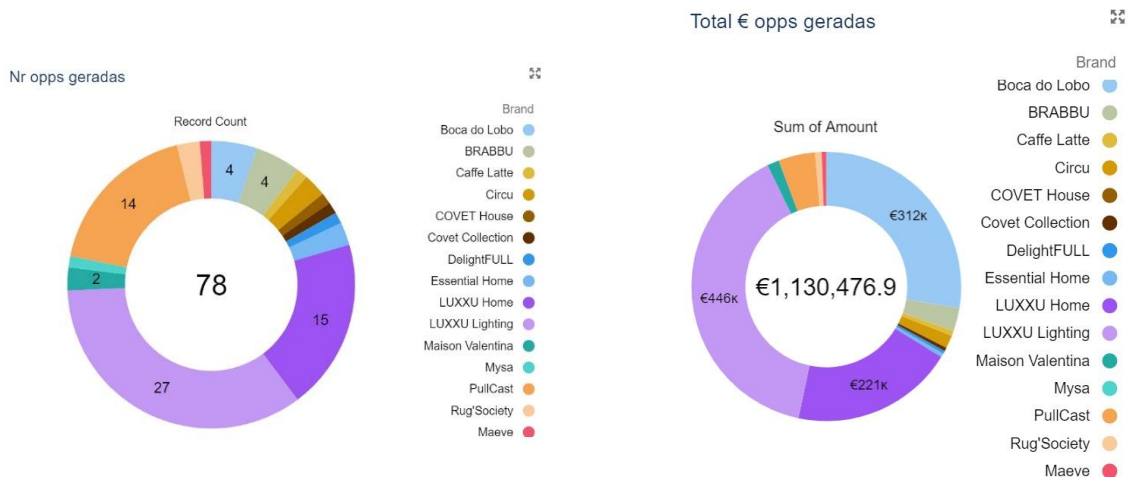


Figure 9 - Statistics from ISaloni 2023: number of opportunities generated and value generated correspondent.

Source: Covet Group, 2023

As indicated by the graphic, MDL created a total of 78 business opportunities, out of which 56 opportunities, totalling 600K, belong to MDL group products. The remaining transactions were made on behalf of other brands.

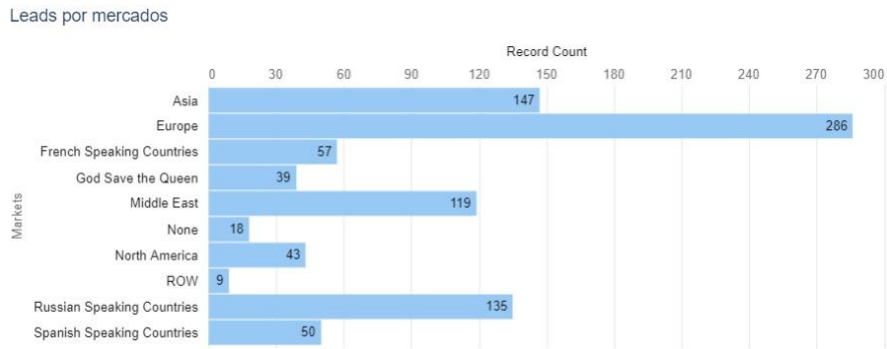


Figure 10 - Statistics ISaloni 2023: Leads by market.

Source: Covet Group, 2023

Europe and Asia were the markets with the most leads the first one explained for having the host country Italy and the second with India being the country with most attendance.

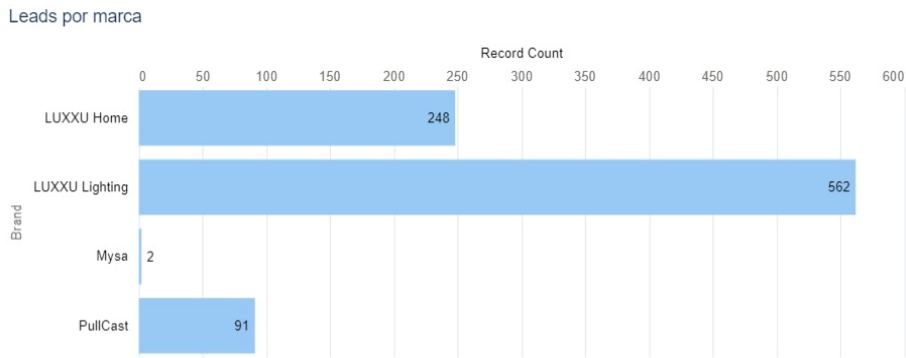


Figure 11 - Statistics ISaloni 2023: number of leads per brand

Source: Covet Group, 2023

Luxxu Lighting stands out as the most popular, with its chandeliers being the main attraction. The data indicates that Luxxu Lighting accounted for 62% of the overall leads.

Overall, I was able to understand that this particular fair was profitable for the MDL group. Participation in ISaloni might potentially enhance visibility and reputation for businesses. The fair serves as a means to exhibit the products to a worldwide audience, while also facilitating connections with professionals, designers, and innovators. It's an excellent place to gain insight into the latest design trends, materials, and technologies. Moreover, it's an environment that stimulates creativity and helps the company think outside the box in terms of new designs and aesthetics.

4.4 Challenges

Establishing an ongoing and consistent commercial relationship with the various markets was arguably the most challenging component of the internship.

For instance, the Indian market presented significant challenges primarily owing to the frequent absence of significant advancements. It was the country where I received most leads however most of them turned out to not having commercial potential. In many situations, the leads would not go beyond the initial contact, with many of them not replying. In cases where contact was established, talks would often stale without reaching any agreements, and in some cases, the leads did not answer at all.

In the Chinese market, the initial point of contact often lacked the authority to make decisions, causing a significant slowdown in our business process. Unfortunately, this frequently led to a loss of momentum, with many contacts fading away midway through, resulting in no further response or feedback from their side.

Ultimately, in the US market, I had several opportunities to meet with prospective clients who had a real interest in the products and showed signs of having strong economic potential. Communication flowed smoothly, and agreements were often reached successfully. However, a notable challenge arose from the intense internal competition among brands within the group. This competition sometimes led to attempts to "steal" deals from our specific brand, resulting in clients making purchases with a sales representative from another brand within the group.

In all of these markets, I explored alternative strategies to generate new business. One such approach involved reaching out to clients who had previously engaged with our brand via email marketing. I was tasked with inquiring whether they were undertaking new projects and expressing the interest in showcasing the brand's latest products to them. Despite the fact that this strategy did not produce a significant amount of success in terms of immediate conversions with past clients citing reasons for not making business, such as finding cheaper options, receiving better offers from competitors, or logistical issues like location, it did allow me to reestablish positive contact with some clients, reaffirm Covet brand presence, understand the intricacies of the business much better, and develop new strategies to appeal to the brand's clients.

4.5 Master's content applied.

My experience in the sales department of Covet Group has allowed me to apply the principles I learned during my master's program in intercultural studies for business to the real-world context of the business industry.

Covet Group operates globally, serving clients and customers from various cultural backgrounds and markets. Working in the sales department provided me the opportunity to engage with clients and customers from different regions, each with their own cultural peculiarities and business practices. This exposure allowed me to gain firsthand experience in navigating intercultural communication and adapting my sales approach to meet the needs and expectations of diverse clients. Classes such as Intercultural Communication Technologies and Culture and Development significantly contributed to effectively navigate cultural disparities and diverse viewpoints while interacting with the company's clients.

Through active interaction with customers from many cultural backgrounds, I developed an understanding of their preferences, tastes, and trends, as well as insights into how cultural factors influence consumer behaviour, decision-making processes, and purchasing habits. This knowledge also enabled me to contribute to developing tailored sales strategies and identifying new market opportunities.

In the course of my experience working in the sales department, I enhanced my cross-cultural communication skills by learning how to adapt my communication style, taking cultural norms, nonverbal signals, and language considerations into account. For instance, the cultural classes I attended such as Chinese language and business culture, provided me with a comprehensive understanding and equipped me with the necessary skills to navigate such global market.

Sales roles often involve building strong relationships with clients and customers. The account managers who worked with me in the Covet Group sales department provided me with the opportunity to observe the development of relationships with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Managing these relationships requires the ability to understand and respect cultural differences and adapt relationship-building approaches to different cultural expectations.

Negotiating with clients from different cultures requires an understanding of their negotiation styles, values, and priorities, as mentioned before. For instance, in Arabic countries, to settle a business or even accept a call, sales developers had to be males. This country cultural practice dictated that males were responsible for negotiating business deals while women were not permitted to engage in business transactions with them.

Ultimately, while working with the team CSR was necessary managing and providing quotations or budgets to international clients, as well as calculating various taxes and percentages. Therefore, attending Intercultural Economics Relations classes facilitated a comprehensive understanding of relevant terminologies and related procedures.

4.6 Final Considerations

To conclude I will provide concrete illustrations derived from my internship experiences in order to establish a clear correlation between the internship and the literature review.

Through my internship I've learned about the importance of effective intercultural communication. Working in projects that involved collaborating with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds I've had to adapt my approach to communicating accordingly. For instance, the speech employed while working with Chinese clients was more cautious and polite than that employed when working with US clients, where the language was more direct.

The internship also helped me realize how important a company's culture is in influencing workers' motivation and actions, and how much room for development there is at Covet Group. The company could benefit from implementing strategies to, for example, reduce the excessive competition between the group brands and give more credit to the repetitive tasks that employees have to complete. One method to make the workplace more cheerful and inspiring for workers is to give efforts like training and employee engagement more priority.

By working with three countries as culturally distinct as China, India and the United States I was able to really understand how Hofstede Cultural dimensions were visible. For instance, China and India have a higher PDI than the United States does, which means that they will always seek approval from higher-ranking executives before

moving forward with negotiations. Knowing this, I prepared myself for a slower negotiation process and the need to address people by their titles and use formal language to get my point across.

While dealing with the Chinese and Indian markets, they often stalled the negotiation process and did not provide concrete answers to help me understand what they wanted. That is very particular of a high context culture and illustrates the practical implications of Hall's theory in a real-world business setting.

Overall, doing an internship at Covet Group offered me valuable insights into the significance of intercultural communication and competence in contemporary companies. Additionally, it provided me with the opportunity to apply and recognize the influence of culture on business operations. Understanding and appreciating cultural dynamics is crucial for achieving success as an international company.

CONCLUSION

The internship at Covet Group provided me with valuable insights into the dynamics of working in a globally oriented company, enabling me to gain a comprehensive understanding of the professional environment I envision to be a part of. Furthermore, this experience facilitated the exploration and enhancement of my professional competencies, specifically in the areas of time management and problem-solving which I believe to be indispensable for effectively navigating the daily operations of an organization.

This report presents an analysis of the dynamic business and management processes inside the Covet Group, particularly in the brands Luxxu and PullCast, where my internship was conducted. Even if there is much potential for growth, I believe that Covet Group's drive to promote cultural sensitivity must be a driving force behind their worldwide achievements. In today's business landscape, it is imperative to appreciate and learn from clients of many cultural backgrounds.

Through some practical examples made during this report I reinforce the importance of Covet Group possessing the capacity to negotiate and embrace many cultural settings in order to facilitate their growth in the global market. An investment in cultural competence can lead to more effective customer engagement and enhanced relationships with clients from diverse backgrounds. One positive development I saw during my internship was the progress achieved in commercial relations with Qatar. A proposal was underway to establish a hotel in Qatar that would use Luxxu products. I believe the AMs' research and understanding of their cultural peculiarities were a significant factor in establishing business. For instance, Islam plays a central role in Qatar's culture, and many aspects of life, including business, are influenced by Islamic principles. Respect for Islamic customs and traditions is crucial. They were aware of Islamic holidays and customs, as these can affect business schedules. Moreover, they engaged in discussions about these traditions driven by curiosity, which, I believe, led to building a stronger relationship and facilitate the achievement of the company's business goals in the country.

I consider that the next step toward becoming a stronger global company is to cultivate a more positive corporate environment and establish a strong corporate culture that fosters employee engagement and motivation. To achieve this, Covet Group should focus on several key strategies such as:

- 1. Addressing the excessive competition among the brands.** Instead of competing against each other, they should work collaboratively to achieve greater success. Collaborative efforts can yield more significant results in the global market.
- 2.** As a global company, it's imperative to recognize the responsibilities that come with serving clients from all corners of the world. Cultivating strong relationships with the clients is paramount. This requires time, effort, and a commitment to understanding their unique needs and cultural differences. Therefore, Covet's Group **must acknowledge their employees' contributions.** The company should implement a system that more effectively rewards and recognizes their hard work and dedication to the company. This not only motivates the workforce but also enhances overall productivity and job satisfaction.

By focusing on these key areas, Covet Group can create a corporate culture that not only benefits the employees but also sets the stage for the company to thrive in the global market. It's a step toward ensuring that the employees feel valued, the clients feel appreciated, and the brand continues to grow in a positive and sustainable manner.

In this report, I have attempted to provide practical examples based on my internship experience at Covet Group, highlighting the significance of intercultural competence within a company. I present intercultural competence as a pivotal factor contributing to the success of a company, particularly one that operates on an international scale. Moreover, stress the need of a strong corporate culture for an organization, as this will serve to both attract new customers and inspire the existing workforce. In conclusion, I consider that both my master and my internship have succeeded in their objectives. Through developing a more profound understanding of the business field, I have come to recognize the significance of fostering a favourable work environment and comprehending the impact of cultural differences on business operations, as well as the most effective approaches to managing those differences. I believe I have acquired new skills that may pave the way for a successful professional life.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix I – Partial market analyses of the interior design industry in China document.



CHINESE MARKET

The modern home décor market in China is a fusion of traditional Chinese furniture with ancient roots and simple modern décor and furniture. In China, the craft of interior design includes various prototypes of lighting, statues, wall-decor, furniture, flooring, and flowers in attractive colours such as red and gold that represent status and power.

- The global market for interior design services is expected to expand to US\$64.1 billion by 2027 at a CAGR of 6.4%, notwithstanding the COVID-19 problem.
- The second-largest economy in the world, China, is anticipated to grow its market to US\$13.4 billion by 2027, with a CAGR of 9.8%.

1. GOLD MANTIS

Established in 1993, Gold Mantis has formed a global building decoration enterprise group with the decoration industry as its main body after roughly three decades of development. It is a market leader in green, environmentally friendly, and healthy public and home decoration.

The company offers design and construction services across the entire industry chain, including interior decoration, curtain walls, landscape, intelligence, and soft decoration.



Figure 1 - Gold Mantis Project

2. ARCHSTUDIO

ARCHSTUDIO was founded in 2010 and has its headquarters in Beijing's 798 Art Zone. It promotes the preservation of a harmonious balance between people, nature, history, and commerce in design practices; Pursues the essence and true way of design; and manages the entire process from conception to completion. It also works to create high-quality, emotionally charged spatial environments that are based on the modern era and look to the future.

The Studio's current primary areas of concentration include architectural design in natural contexts, urban architecture repair and transformation, and improvement of consumption space, etc.



Figure 2 - ArchStudio Project

CABINET AND DOOR HARDWARE

1. AMERTOP

Founded in 1990 in Yuhuan, China. AMERTOP is dedicated to improving the quality of life for users all over the world. AmerTOP has been working hard for many years selecting the world's top designers and design stars, and presenting door lock products with aesthetic thinking to all people who love life. Professional design team has won the "German Red Dot Product Design Award" in 2022 for architectural reconstruction series, because of its unique creative design and technological innovation.



2. YALIS Design

With more than 10 years of expertise, YALIS Design is a well-known producer specializing in door hardware for doors. YALIS Design is primarily a manufacturer of glass door handle locks and zinc alloy lever door handles.



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Appendix II – Highlights Internship Diary

01/02/2023

Presentation of the company, workplace, and showroom.

Presentation to the sales team.

Analysis of the group's various brands and organisational structure.

02/02/2023

Theoretical introduction - Understanding the different LX products by analysing the catalogues and information presented by the company.

06/02/2023

Understand whether the SD are following up leads according to the parameters they have been taught. Understand CRM. How to use it.

Draw some conclusions from evaluating leads.

07/02/2023

Product management: reviewing the brand's products; updating prices.

08/02/2023

Product management.

10/02/2023

Salesforce trainee program: Understand how to present the products to LX and PC clients.

14/02/2023

Salesforce trainee program: Preparing reports in Salesforce: Understand the sales and markets Covet works with. Evaluate SD lead profiling.

Create a report with the leads created this week; understand the rating and commercial potential.

15/02/2023

Product training: finishes and materials LX, PC.

Salesforce trainee program: Preparation of reports.

16/02/2023

Salesforce trainee program.

Start market research: Top ID in China.

Check if the chosen companies are registered in Salesforce.

17/02/2023

Salesforce trainee program

22/02/2023

Company email creation + SF account

First steps on SF as an SD: Chinese Market

22/02/2023

Market research development (ID Chinese Market)

Replying to leads and profiling them.

24/02/2023

Replying to leads and profiling them.

First calls.

28/02/2023

Making calls - follow leads.

Profiling new leads.

01/03/2023

Report - Buyer's brand India.

Market research India.

03/03/2023

Making calls + profiling leads + contacting ex-buyers.

07/03/2023

Send follow leads email; Profiling new leads; Cold calling.

16/03/2023

Sales formation: How to contact past clients.

Follow lead: call and profiling.

20/03/2023

Dealing with price requests. Quotations.

Send qualified leads to AM.

28/03/2023

Profiling new leads; Follow leads; Contacting leads.

31/03/2023

First contact with US Market: profiling leads, contact them, answering to requests.

03/03/2023

Profiling and answering leads.

Cold calling.

20/03/2023

PullCast finishes and materials formation.

Profiling and answering leads. Cold calling.

27/03/2023

Profiling and answering leads.

Cold calling.

03/04/2023

Profiling and answering leads.

Cold calling.

10/04/2023

Profiling and answering leads.

Cold calling.

18/04/2023

ISaloni Fair.

Backoffice work: Profiling leads, Replying to request, handle quotations.

27/04/2023

Organising overdue leads.

First online meeting with AM to establish a partnership with an US client.

02/05/2023

Organising follow leads. India and China market.

09/05/2023

Profiling and answering leads.

Cold calling.

15/05/2023

Profiling and answering leads.

Cold calling.

22/05/2023

Profiling and answering leads. Cold calling.

Moving my markets to another SD.

Explain the development so far.

Annex I – Trainee evaluation

INSTITUTO SUPERIOR DE CONTABILIDADE E ADMINISTRAÇÃO DO PORTO POLITECNICO DO PORTO

GEE

GABINETE DE ESTÁGIOS E EMPREGABILIDADE
GRELHA DE AVALIAÇÃO DO ESTÁGIO
ESTUDANTE Nº - _____

P.PORTO

CVET LDA
TRAVESSA MARQUES DE SÁ, Nº68
4435-024 RIO TINTO
NIF 514 671 467

Intercultural Studies for Business
Licenciatura/Mestrado

Estagiário
Lara Manuela Pinto de Sousa
Nome:

Empresa
Covet, LDA.
Nome:

Ana Isabel Martins Ribeiro
Tutor:

1 - ASSIDUIDADE E PONTUALIDADE

- a - Assiduidade
- b - Pontualidade

CLASSIFICAÇÃO¹

1	2	3	4	5
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				X
				X

2 - AMBIENTE ORGANIZACIONAL

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

				X
				X
				X
				X
				X
				X
				X
				X
				X

3 - PLANO DE ESTÁGIO

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

				X
				X
				X
				X
				X
				X

¹Nota: para efeitos de classificação considera-se: 1 - Mau; 2 - Fraco; 3 - Suficiente; 4 - Bom; 5 - Muito bom
(a) Caso se aplique
ESTUDANTE Nº - _____

4 - POSTURA

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

1	2	3	4	5
				X
				X

5 - OBSERVAÇÕES A REPORTAR AO ISCAP

Durante o estágio atingiu ótimos níveis de desempenho. Apresentou estratégias que melhoraram resultados, no que toca a aperfeiçoar as relações internacionais com os países que manteve relação. É organizada, hábil e criativa apresentando soluções para os obstáculos que encontrou, revelando diferentes abordagens. No que toca a execução de tarefas e relações excedeu os padrões de produtividade, contribuindo para o crescimento da empresa.

28 / 06 / 2023

Assinatura da entidade de acolhimento:

CVET LDA
TRAVESSA MARQUES DE SÁ, Nº68
4435-024 RIO TINTO
NIF 514 671 467





17
years

50
Business Units

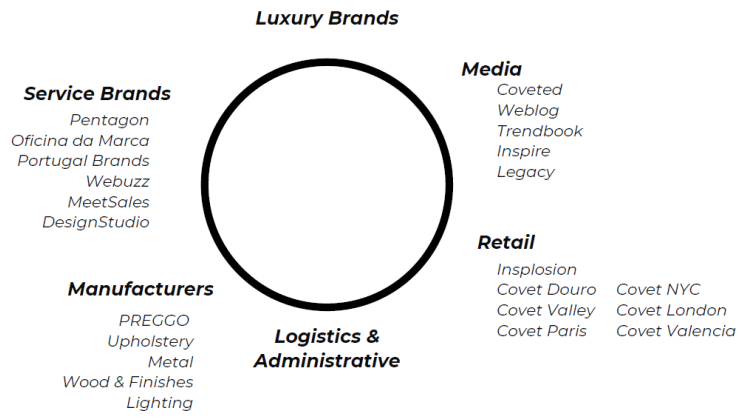
+500
People

+50 m
Investment

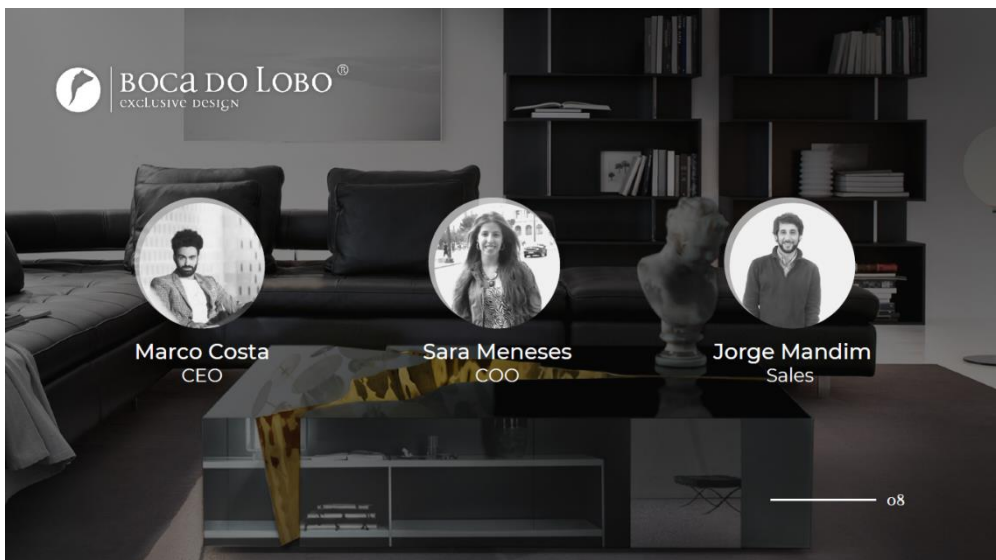
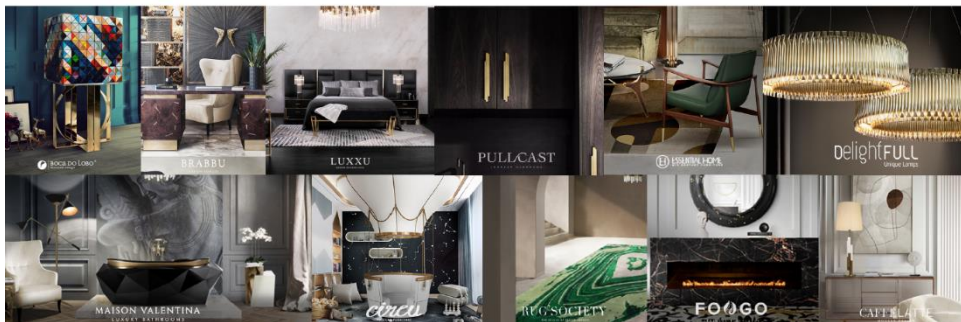
Our *mission*

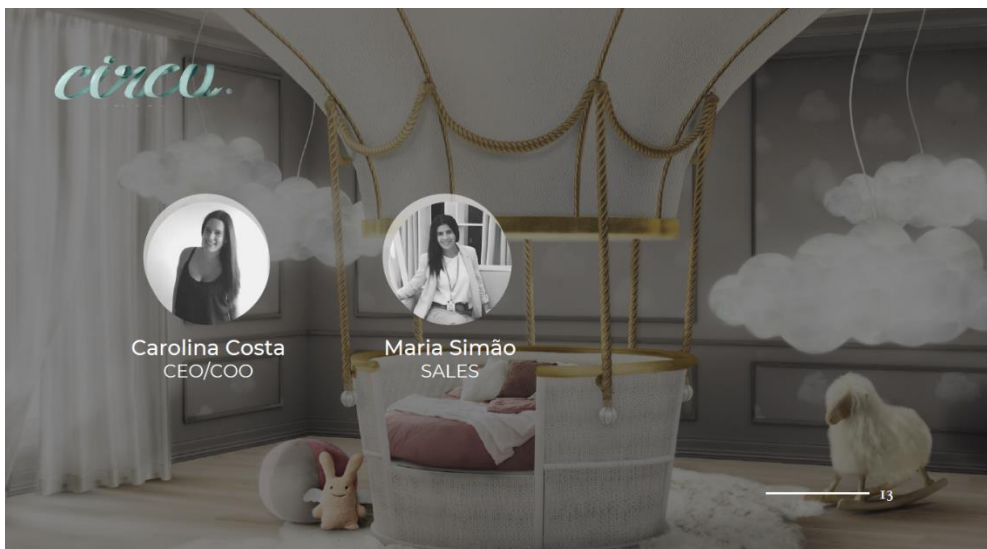
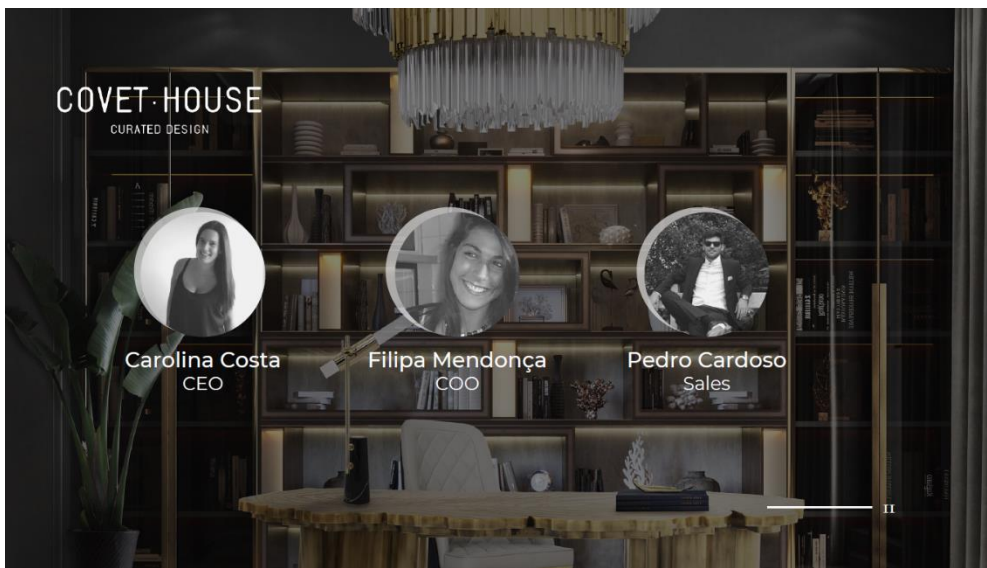
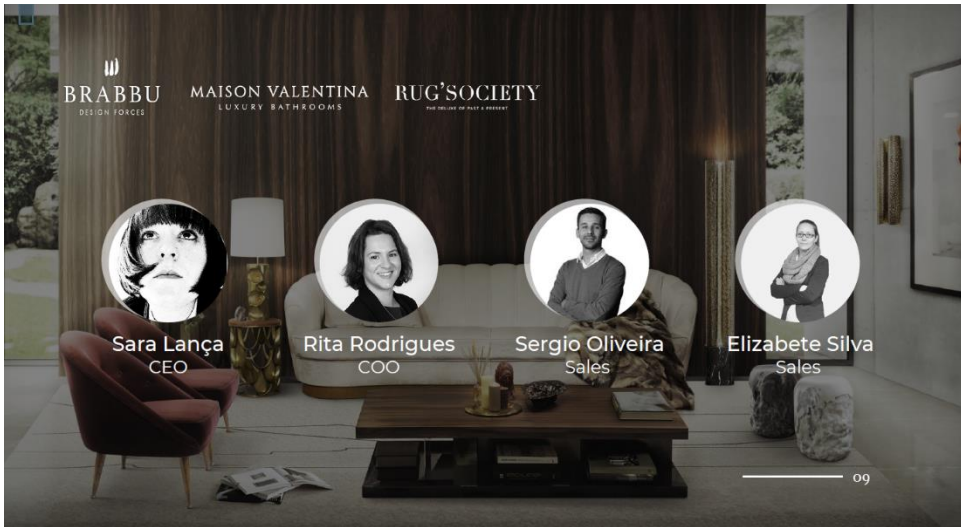
To Inspire,
Elevating Design and Craftsmanship.

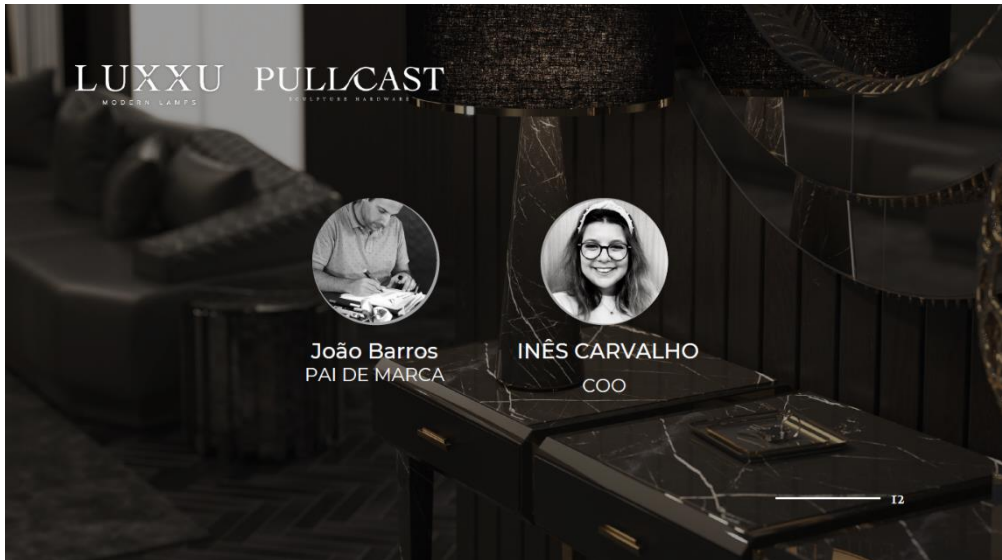
We are



We are
Luxury Brands

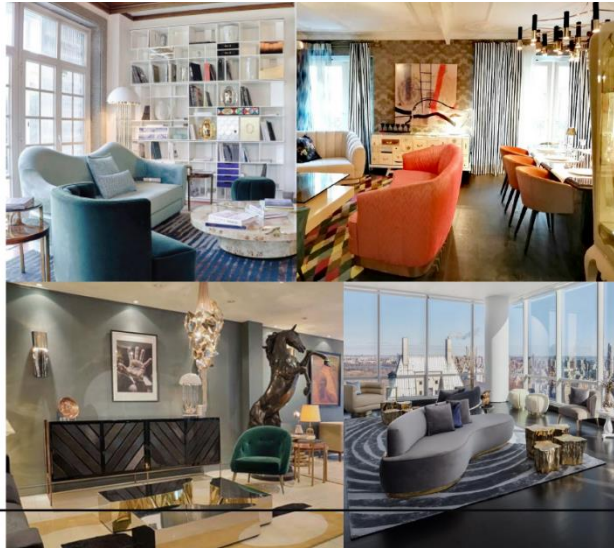






COVET · HOUSE
curated design

- Douro
- Valley
- London
- Paris
- NYC
- Valencia



PLEASURE TO MEET YOU.