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Master Degree Program in Data-Driven Marketing

**The role of employees' internal mobility,
empowerment, and leadership in hospitality
industry:**

Its implications on customer satisfaction

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Dissertation presented as a partial requirement for obtaining
the Master's Degree Program in Data-Driven Marketing, with
a specialization in Data Science for Marketing

NOVA Information Management School
Instituto Superior de Estatística e Gestão de Informação
Universidade Nova de Lisboa

**THE ROLE OF EMPLOYEES' INTERNAL MOBILITY,
EMPOWERMENT, AND LEADERSHIP IN HOSPITALITY
INDUSTRY: ITS IMPLICATIONS ON CUSTOMER
SATISFACTION**

by

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that the work described in this document is my own and not from someone else.
All the assistance I have received from other people is duly acknowledged and all the sources (published or not published) are referenced.

This work has not been previously evaluated or submitted to NOVA Information Management School or elsewhere.

Lisbon, 2022

José Maria Cabo Verde Didier Ferreira

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this paper to all people who have been present in my life throughout this process of learning and, at times, sacrifice.

My family (parents, siblings, uncles and grandmother) gave me a lot of support whenever I had the normal concerns of those who want to learn, but above all, to have something that is relevant for the entire scientific community for to which this paper may be useful. I thank my parents who provided me with this blessing of being able to learn and develop new skills on a personal level. Hoping that at the end it will prove fundamental to my professional life.

I take this opportunity to thank my grandmother who has been a very important pillar in all my life, even if, at the age of 91, she believes that after a Bachelors' degree in Hotel Management I will have a great career as a pastry chef. A word of appreciation to my three siblings who constantly help me to become aware that patience is really a virtue.

Thanks to Professor Vítor Santos for introducing me to this course and making me hope that all this sacrifice of the last two years, including a pandemic, will be the beginning of a life full of opportunities. Thanks to my advisor Professor Diego Costa Pinto for all his advices and guidance. And, finally, to my co-advisor Professor Mijail Naranjo for being a major help in the process. A big thank you to Professor Joana Neves for her constant help throughout the process since the beginning.

Finally, it remains for me to thank all my friends who have listened to me repeatedly vent about the delivery of this article that means so much to me.

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RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo é humanizar as organizações de gestão na indústria hoteleira. Tal como em outros sectores económicos, o lucro sempre teve um papel de liderança na forma como as organizações trabalham e, por vezes, a satisfação dos empregados e dos clientes não é tida em conta na procura de melhorar o lucro. A fim de alcançar a satisfação do cliente que conduzirá ao sucesso, é preciso ter em consideração fatores relevantes. Este documento consiste na apresentação de todo um processo, no qual, através da recolha de uma amostra de 744 respostas de colaboradores da indústria hoteleira e turística, será possível analisar as variáveis como constructos e, num próximo passo, compreender a validade dos caminhos e das hipóteses entre eles. Este estudo evidência que a Mobilidade interna, empoderamento e liderança são elementos-chave para alcançar a satisfação do cliente. Este modelo também apresenta conclusões através das quais é possível compreender quais as características que devem existir num ambiente de trabalho para que a satisfação do cliente não seja prejudicada e quais as características que funcionam independentemente. O método *partial least squares structural equation modeling* (PLS-SEM) é utilizado para compreender o nível de variância entre constructos e a importância de cada variável na explicação do modelo, de modo a reconhecer a importância do caminho entre elas na obtenção de resultados significativos. Neste documento particular, as conclusões são bastante promissoras, revelam que através das variáveis estudadas poderemos garantir uma maior satisfação do cliente. O poder de cada uma das variáveis estudadas permitiu a compreensão de como são agentes importantes na explicação da satisfação do cliente, e, consequentemente, do sucesso da organização. No processo, a variável "Empoderamento" revelou ser um ponto mediador positivo para o sucesso da gestão.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Gestão Hoteleira; Progressão Interna; Empoderamento; Liderança; Satisfação do cliente; PLS-SEM

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to humanize managing organizations in the hospitality industry. As in other economic sectors, profit has always played a leading role in the way organizations work and sometimes employee and customer satisfaction are not taken into account in the quest to improve profit. In order to achieve customer satisfaction that will lead to success, you need to consider relevant factors. This paper consists of the presentation of an entire process, in which, through the collection of 744 data samples from employees in the hotel and tourism industry, it was possible to analyze the variables as constructs and, in a next step, understand the validity of the paths and hypotheses between them. Our study presents evidence that Internal Mobility, empowerment and leadership are key factors to achieve customer satisfaction. This model also presents conclusions through which it was possible to understand which characteristics must exist in a work environment so that customer satisfaction is not impaired and which characteristics work independently. The partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) method is used to understand the level of variance between constructs and the importance of each variable in explaining the model, in order to recognize the importance of the path between them in achieving significant results. In this particular paper, the conclusions are quite promising, revealing that through the variables studied we can guarantee greater customer satisfaction. The power of each and every of the studied variables provided the understanding of how they are important agents to explain customer satisfaction, and, consequently, the organization success. In the process, "Empowerment" revealed to be a positive mediator point guiding the management towards success.

KEYWORDS

Hospitality Management; Internal Mobility; Empowerment; Leadership; Customer Satisfaction; PLS-SEM.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CA	Cronbach's Alpha
CR	Composite Reliability
CS	Customer Satisfaction
E	Empowerment
HPWS	High-Performance Work Systems
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio
IM	Internal Mobility
L	Leadership
pA	Rho_A
PLS-SEM	Partition Least Square – Structural Equation Modelling
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor

1. INTRODUCTION

In hospitality management it is critical to have more than good customer service skills. It is needed specialized leadership skills to create a great group. Helping the whole organization to operate in the highest level (Les Roches, 2022). The managers are accountable for the coaching, informing, and showing concern in order to influence employees to exceed customer expectations (Raub & Robert, 2013).

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the tourism industry to a standstill. It has threatened the survival of organizations and has put a significant number of jobs at risk (Dorta-Afonso et al., 2021). Uncertainty, in a rough way, has generated a global warning into the hospitality workforce and directors. This economic sector, as is well known, always has had some issues concerning the work conditions given to its personnel, and the pandemic only worsened it by causing an even greater uncertainty among them.

The industry's profit has been centered on the manager's work which directly correlates with the success or failure of the organization. Nevertheless, it represents a broad universalization of many other organizational factors. Factors for the welfare of employees, their motivation to work, and their willingness to achieve the organization's objectives as if they were its own. In hospitality management, as a service industry, employees are the major asset regarding the profitability. Past research on service-profit chain (Heskett et al., 2008), have shown critical connections between internal service quality, employee satisfaction and the value of services provided to the customer, leading to his satisfaction (Jeon & Choi, 2012). Therefore, should we all assume that "satisfied employees make satisfied customers?" (Ming-Chun Tsai, 2010).

To answer that question, some other factors need to be studied. First of all, the employee's well-being should be guaranteed. However, to achieve it, it may be important to pay attention to the matters of the internal mobility opportunities within the organization, empowerment given to the employees and leadership that enables a better environment pursuing the overall satisfaction of customers.

In the context of the hospitality sector, meeting profit targets are a bigger concern than meeting employees' needs, even when knowing that satisfied employees are more likely to work with more quality and achieve more results (Poulston, 2015). Different

approaches have been identified in several surveys to discover what generates this satisfaction, often called “job satisfaction”.

According to Ming-Chun Tsai et al. (2010), “job satisfaction“ suggests the meaning of employees’ emotions and attitudes towards their work, as well as their personal perception of their roles. As a disclaimer, in this study, the objectives are to have a better understanding of the factors that may influence how each employee feels about their job and whether this connection generates satisfaction in their professional life. Furthermore, in this specific industry, there are many drawbacks regarding the quality of employees’ work and even their satisfaction. Seasonality forces every organization to recruit new employees on short term or seasonal contracts to cope with peak season demand. These conditions have a negative effect on keeping all employees motivated and committed to the company they work for (Hunker, 2014).

Regardless of these constraints, there are a multitude of factors, from individual to organizational, that determine employee satisfaction (Ažić, 2017). The defined independent variables items are antecedents to explain the behavior of the employees of a hotel/ tourism organization. This positive employee behavior – including motivation to work and commitment – has high correlations with employee satisfaction in terms of turnover (Kumar, 2014).

Employees who interact with customers are in a position to improve their awareness and meet customer’s needs. It can also be stated that satisfied employees are seen as motivated employees who not only make adequate efforts and provide better customer service but can also, please customers better (Kurdi et al., 2020). Therefore, satisfied employees can be seen as empowered employees who have the resources and training to perform their jobs effectively. Dissatisfied employees, on the other hand, often do not perform effectively, do not demonstrate an understanding of meeting customers’ needs and do not respond adequately to their requests (Ugboro & Obeng, 2000). Furthermore, it was found that “satisfied employees are motivated and want to provide good services at every opportunity and have positive perceptions of services/ products when they sell them” (Kurdi et al., 2020). This research builds on previous findings by examining the extent to which Internal Mobility, Empowerment, and Leadership affect customer satisfaction. Furthermore, results supported the evidence that the Empowered by Leaders, with the

possibility of being promoted, do not only demonstrated positive attitudes and emotions, but positively affect their productivity and job performance (Matzler & Renzl, 2007). It also improves management effectiveness and citizenship behavior (Kurdi et al., 2020).

In short, this paper provides great contributions at a scientific level. It can be useful for Human Resources, Top Management, Organizational Leadership, but, above all, those who read it will recognize that few articles have ever been read or published with the person as the main focus. The employee and the customer, their satisfaction as humans, will be the main focus of this scientific paper. May it be a warning guide, but also be used by current and future managers in the service sector, especially in hospitality, so that a new attitude is taken to improve the overall satisfaction of those involved in the sector: the employee as a service provider and the customer as a receiver of a quality experience.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

In order to explain the factors that influence a customer's satisfaction in the hotel and tourism industry, a conceptual model has been created. A model with reflective indicators to explain the constructs. Specifically, all constructs are measured by a total of 11 indicators/ items that have been derived from literature, quantitative study, and pretests on the survey answers (Hair et al., 2017).

The first step in using PLS-SEM involves creating a path model that links variables and constructs based on supported theory. When designing the path model like the one shown in, it is important to discern the location of the constructs as well as the relationships between them (Hair et al., 2014).

Through **Figure 1**, we can observe the five hypotheses studied, which relate the level of employee satisfaction (having as study variables: Internal Mobility, Empowerment, and Leadership) with the level of customer satisfaction. The study has two independent variables (IM and L) and two dependent variables (E and CS), where Empowerment will be a mediator variable in the model.

According to Hair et al. (2014), mediation describes a situation where a mediating variable (Empowerment) soaks up the effect of an exogenous construct (independent variable: i.e., IM and L) in the PLS pathway model. Exogenous constructs work independently, and do not have any pointing indicator at them; endogenous constructs are explained by other constructs (i.e., Employment and Customer Satisfaction). However, often, considered dependent variables within the relationship, can act as independent when placed between two constructs (i.e., Employment). The analysis of the strength of the Empowerment relationships with the other constructs allows the researcher to further understanding the underlying reasons for the relationship between an exogenous construct (Leadership and Internal Mobility) and an endogenous construct (Customer Satisfaction) (Hair et al., 2017).

Instead of a simple assessment of the direct effects of employee satisfaction study on job characteristics, regarding customer satisfaction, mediation allows us to extend the study to a more adequate perception of overall relationships. The breakthrough in the

application of PLS-SEM has allowed the study to extend beyond the direct effects of the constructs and their relationships. More complex set-ups such as mediation and moderation (discussed later in this paper) can be used for a new and different investigation, even using the same variables, enhancing the possibility of new scientific results and methodological advances. As discussed earlier, and in order for this research to contribute to a more complete study, a more complex model set-up was designed (along with the measurement of the mediating effect in the model) as an estimator of the moderation effects.

Moderation, following Hair et al. (2014), happens at the point when the effect of an exogenous construct (independent variable) on an endogenous construct (dependent variable) relies on the values of another variable, which influences the relationship. For example, in this paper analysis, it was studied, as moderator Internal Mobility, to understand what is its effect on the relationship between Leadership and Customer Satisfaction. It was assessed that Internal Mobility has an impact on the relationship between Leadership and Customer Satisfaction, which will be further developed in the “Discussion” and “Conclusion” chapters. **Figure 1** captures the research model:

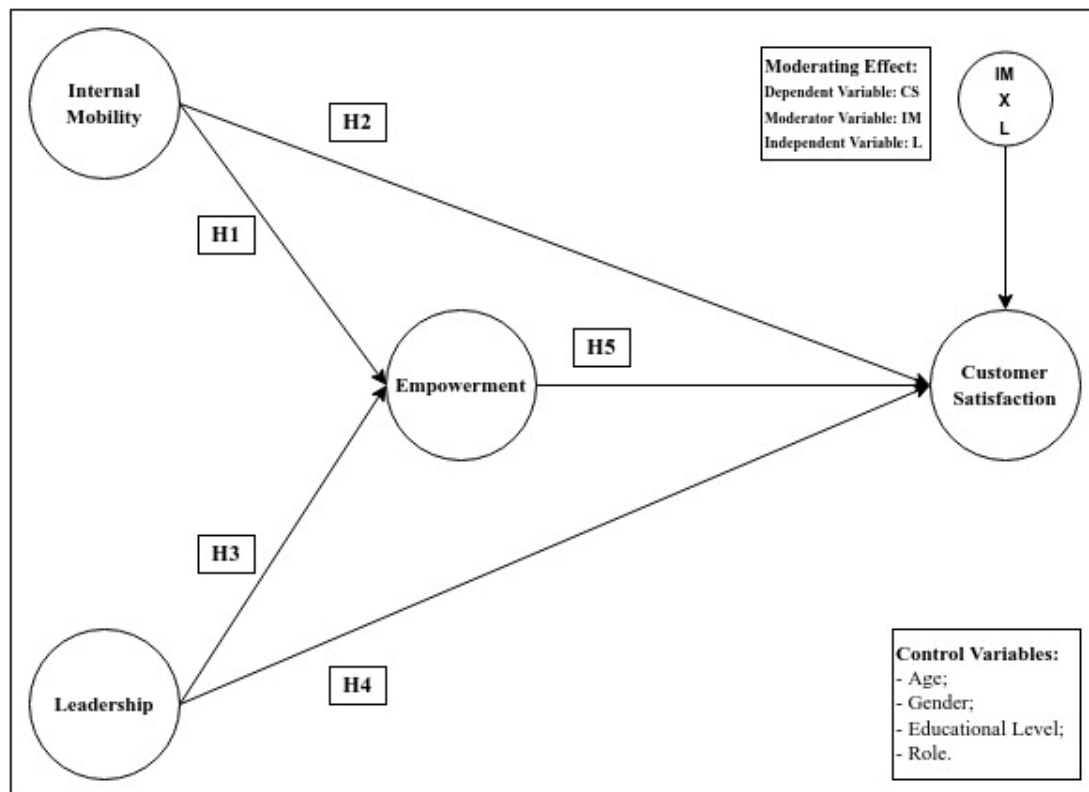


Figure 1 – Conceptual model

2.2. SCALES AND MEASURES

The following table represent the scales and measures used in the application of PLS-SEM method. Furthermore, the sources used, which helped to build the model that gave rise to this paper, are defined in **Table 1**. These sources were the main enablers for this paper to be written, but many more bibliographical references were used, so this paper could be an extension of the already existing literature.

Constructs	Items	Sources
Internal Mobility	IM1 – Opportunities for promotions	(Dorta-Afonso et al., 2021) (Kalleberg & Mastekaasa, 2001)
	IM2 – Opportunities to ask for advancements	
	IM3 – Training support	
Empowerment	E1 – Supportive supervision	(Ming-Chun Tsai, 2010)
	E2 – Self decision-making	
	E3 – Job position	
Leadership	L1 – Coaching	(Raub & Robert, 2013)
	L2 – Informing	
	L3 – Showing concern	
Customer Satisfaction	CS1 – Appreciation	(Wampande & Osunsan, 2020)
	CS2 – Recognition	

Table 1 – Scales and measures of the theoretical approach

2.3. LITERATURE CONTRIBUTION ON THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In **Table 2**, it is possible to see which bibliographical references had the most impact on the choice of variables in this paper. It is possible to read a succinct overview of each one of the papers, which clearly demonstrates the importance that the articles represent for the present article.

Title	Research	References
Effects of HPWS on “hospitality employee’s outcomes” through their Organizational Commitment, Motivation, and Job Satisfaction	It proposes the study of the effects of High-Performance Work Systems to assess the employees’ outcomes in the hospitality industry. Research conducted using a PLS-SEM approach, which investigates the power of different latent variables on employee motivation and commitment, and finally, on job satisfaction, quality of life, and job performance.	(Dorta-Afonso et al., 2021)
Drivers of hospitality industry employees’ job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job performance	An investigation into the effect of key antecedents of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job performance. Useful latent variables were used in the present research – empowerment, and leadership.	(Ming-Chun Tsai, 2010)
Empowerment, Organizational Commitment, and Voice Behavior in the Hospitality Industry: Evidence from a Multinational Sample	This study is based on understanding working conditions and their relationship to employees’ well-being while at work.	(Raub & Robert, 2013)
Employee attitude and customer satisfaction in selected hotels in Kampala, Uganda	Through quantitative research, it studies the effects of employee attitude on customer satisfaction. An important study to understand how customer satisfaction can be measured, in order to create a study with meaningful relationships.	(Wampande & Osunsan, 2020)

Table 2 – References that contributed to the conceptual model

3. THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

The major aim of this chapter is to provide all the details of each exogenous and endogenous construct (independent and dependent, respectively) of the conceptual model. By detailing all the concepts and definitions behind each construct, it is possible to better understand the paths – hypotheses – chosen to study worker satisfaction, in this particular service sector.

A questionnaire was released exclusively for workers in the hospitality industry to understand how Internal Mobility, Empowerment, and Leadership affect their job satisfaction. And, if as a consequence, customer satisfaction increases due to the worker's state of that job satisfaction.

Dorta-Afonso et al. (2021), proposed a model of High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) on Hospitality Employees' Outcomes. This last research has concluded the importance of this HPWS to increase employees' motivation, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. The variables studied shows relevance for high levels of performance. This research has appropriated some of the meaning of the previous research to study at the end the effects on customer satisfaction; including variables such as "Empowerment" and "Leadership" (Ming-Chun Tsai, 2010), alongside with the already used by Dorta-Afonso et al. (2021) "Internal Mobility".

Thus, the hypotheses were developed for investigating the effects of Internal Mobility (Dorta-Afonso et al., 2021) and Empowerment and Leadership (Ming-Chun Tsai, 2010) on Customer Satisfaction (Wampande & Osunsan, 2020).

Unfortunately, there are just a few research conducted caring about the employee's well-being conditions in the hospitality industry. The affective well-being of hospitality employees is not only important for providing "service with a smile," but can also affect what employees do during the service (Raub et al., 2021). In past research on the influence of stress on job performance, the Yerkes-Dodson law states that there is an empirical relationship between stress and performance as an inverted U-shaped curve. The research shows that when arousal is very high or very low, performance tends to suffer, depending on the complexity and difficulty of the task to be performed (Nickerson, 2021). It is known as a fact that stress is present in quotidian work life, however it is a common

practice by managers to pressure employees, causing anxiety and fear towards higher achievements. Nevertheless, “excessive pressure may lead to side effects such as the creation of employee dissatisfaction, which may compromise individual and/ or organizational performance” (Trivellas et al., 2013).

At the end of the day, whether in the third sector or any other area of activity, in an organization, if there is leadership, empowerment and a possibility to grow within the organization, employees will be more satisfied, and consequently customers will be more satisfied. This paper is about to prove these hypotheses.

3.1. INTERNAL MOBILITY

Managerial practices, such as provision of job security with extensive skills training, opportunities for promotion, and other financial benefits (not studied in the present research) are measures that contribute to the development or maintenance of the commitment enhanced by each employee in their workplace (Li-Yun et al., 2007). Furthermore, the motivation to accomplish an advancement to higher positions imply internal competition between workers (Kalleberg & Mastekaasa, 2001). There are various factors driving to the advancements or promotions in each organization (Lee & Raschke, 2016), however, at this point, this study will only rely on the opportunities for a promotion, the liberty felt by the employee to ask for an advancement, as well as the support in the matter of professional training. According to Kalleberg & Mastekaasa (2001), there are two types of job mobility (intraorganizational and interorganizational mobility). In this particular paper, it was studied the intraorganizational job mobility – “satisfied movers, committed stayers”. Changes within the organization beyond promotions can quite often be the result of a unilateral management decision, particularly during periods of downsizing and restructuring. In some cases, however, employees may also take the initiative to request another job within the organization. All these factors, if they generate satisfaction in the employee, also generate satisfaction for the job and, consequently, generate satisfaction in the end customer and the service provided.

Good leadership and a culture of empowerment within organizations in conjunction with a growth policy within the company results in a more positive and hopeful environment at work, which leads to positive competitiveness – creating satisfaction with good service.

For example, does Internal Mobility have a uniquely one-sided relationship with customer satisfaction? Or does it need empowered employees in conjunction with good, active, but positive leadership?

For the study of this construct, items collected from the two papers referenced in **Table 1** were used. According to this table, intraorganizational promotion opportunities, opportunities to request career advancement or to apply for it within the company itself, and also the support given to the employee with constant training – hoping to teach the employee the best and most significant practices to reach a level of excellence. All these factors generate motivation and commitment. Such commitment that they will want to return to the company through satisfactory results (results that include the satisfaction of their own customers). Satisfied employees have greater responsibility and feel it; a culture of bullying is not necessary to achieve reliable results.

According to Ugboro & Obeng (2000), the emphasis on customer satisfaction insists upon interactions between front-line employees and customers being enjoyable experiences especially for the customer. Thus, the more skilled and highly motivated employees are, more satisfied they are with their jobs. Due to trainings and possibility of growth. “Empowerment contributes to [...] the degree to which employees feel that the organization continually satisfies their needs“ (Ugboro & Obeng, 2000).

According to the previous conceptualization, it was submitted that:

Hypothesis 1: Internal Mobility positively affect Empowerment.

Hypothesis 2: Internal Mobility positively affect Customers’ Satisfaction.

3.2. LEADERSHIP

Leadership can be defined as the capacity to affect the team force to achieve a set of objectives and goals delimited by the organization and their managers (Ming-Chun Tsai, 2010). By influencing the employees on believing in the organizational culture, by promoting shared values and shared vision among all, turning meaningful their purpose of working (Hunker, 2014). The leaders are often the key towards the success of the employee's satisfaction, they have the duty to fight for the employees' well-being, work conditions, stable work hours, work-life balance, etc. (Baum, 2019; Poulston, 2015; Raub & Robert, 2013). The employees have the duty, with conditions ensured, to fight among the goals delimited.

There are two different approaches to leadership: Transactional and Transformational. Transactional relies on rewarding employees for good performance and penalizing them for poor performance. While transformational consists of developing a strategy, on a vision shared by stakeholders, managers and administration that is then sharing with the entire workforce, so that motivation levels are high for commitment to achieving the organization goals (Hunker, 2014).

This last approach is highly motivational for employee satisfaction and willingness to work, with leaders coaching, informing, influencing, and concern about the traits of achieving positive emotions from workers, expecting a nurturing relationship between them and employees.

It is not only frontline employees who must be motivated and committed. It is important that the leaders are extremely focused on teamwork and also focused on teaching, being understanding, caring, and believing in their employees, so that they can gain new and important skills to achieve service quality. Generate satisfaction. It is these leaders who have the responsibility to ensure that employees, at a more operational level, have more and more opportunities and responsibilities at their jobs.

The leaders have it in themselves to plan the objectives, to seek the autonomy of their employees, and to promote the self-development of their team. For example, by delegating authority and sometimes allowing their employees to take on leadership roles or autonomy so that they can learn to manage day-to-day problems on their own.

According to Huertas-Valvidia et al. (2019), there is a great correlation between this leadership empowerment and employee engagement in a company. And, as seen earlier, this employee engagement has a strong relationship with creating end-customer satisfaction.

No question, too, that the leadership roles are key to employee empowerment. Actually, employees cannot be empowered unless great leadership is in play. Empowering employees properly can be translated into employee best practices, which later on may also lead to enhance customer satisfaction. (Ugboro & Obeng, 2000).

Thus, the hypotheses were proposed as follows:

Hypothesis 3: Leadership positively affect Empowerment.

Hypothesis 4: Leadership positively affect Customer Satisfaction.

3.3. EMPOWERMENT

The essence of empowerment is to affect decision making down to the lowest possible level (Lin, 2002). Each job role has its individual responsibilities. In an organization with a culture of empowerment, both managers and employees are given a clear vision and enough information to achieve the objectives to their positions. As employees become more comfortable with decision-making, they are able to handle problems without supervision support.

Citing the article by Ming-Chun Tsai et al. (2010), empowerment can be defined as sharing with the employees, regarding the organization's performance, information about rewards based on the organization's performance, knowledge that allows employees to understand and contribute to the organization's performance, and empowering employees to make decisions that influence the direction and outcome of the organization.

According to the paper by Lin, C. (2002), perceptions of empowerment were associated with higher job satisfaction. Organizations should foster effective communication throughout the organization, promote self-development, and keep employees updated on the organization's performance. With much of the organizations opting for types of management with the goal of "using" their employees as assets, instead, organizations should seek to instill dedication in their employees so that results can show up via their empowerment (Lin, 2002).

In other words, employees in a service industry, whose main goal is to satisfy the customer, must feel relevant for the organization goal achievements, so that they have the highest motivation possible and highest level of commitment towards the company. Thus, for this dedication and "love for the shirt" to exist, good communication is mandatory: a communication immune to vertical hierarchy, a communication that is transparent, so that employees feel supported by the training provided by their supervisors/ leaders, informed about the present and future of the organization they work for, and feel that there is concern for their well-being.

The above makes possible the existence of a good relationship between leaders and employees, which leads to employees to feel empowered (Ming-Chun Tsai, 2010). Empowered in terms of support, feeling that they can make their own decisions without

being undermined, and that they are trained to know exactly what their role is at work. This whole approach helps the organizational environment to be seen as positive, and this relationship has repercussions on customer satisfaction. Profit goes along with it, but the concern will always have to be the welfare of the employee and the customer (Heskett et al., 2008). This is perhaps one of the greatest contributions of this paper, the focus on the well-being.

Many measures are defined to achieve the much-desired employee empowerment. Compensation of employees for results achieved, i.e., performance-based rewards; opportunities to participate in the company's strategy bureaucracies; giving autonomy and decision possibilities; communication; career advancements; promotions; among many others.

In this paper, we use very specific items. According to the structural model defined. And so, according to Ugboro & Obeng (2000), employee empowerment should be operationalized by encouraging employees to respond with quality in the presence of a problem they have to solve. They should have the opportunity to be delegated authority and resources to solve problems that increase the quality of a stay, trip, transportation, and so on. The goal is to keep employees energetic and capable of providing the highest quality service possible in order to exceed customer expectations.

Focusing on the customer and customer satisfaction requires a strong relationship between the two parties. And this relationship becomes more and more effective with motivation, commitment and job satisfaction, leadership, and organization. The perception of customer satisfaction is in what they see, feel, and are offered. Quality is in what is provided to them: the focus must be on an organization with a culture centered on quality, involvement, and empathy.

Stated formally, it was hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 5: Empowerment positively affect Customer Satisfaction.

3.4. CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Customer satisfaction is a path. Like any path, it can be taken in different ways until the final destination is reached. In this case, when seeking satisfaction as the “final destination“, spending time finding a different/ innovative or better path it is not a waste of time (Kurdi et al., 2020).

In this case, customer satisfaction is being studied through relationships with internal employee mobility within the organization, the empowerment given to employees in the same organization, and the quality of the leaders.

There are different orientations within a company, but the quest to put people at the center is a very common approach at the marketing concept. Putting the customer as the main focus of the market orientation to achieve customer satisfaction is indeed a characteristic of a management model that gives primacy to teaching those who can't do better, those who can't communicate, those who don't have power, those who don't have opportunities, but want to have it all (Jyoti & Sharma, 2012). Opportunities, training, feeling useful, protected, important, wanting to be satisfied.

Some authors understood by their released studies that the main cause of guest or customer satisfaction is deeply related to the employees' satisfaction (Ažić, 2017). Customer satisfaction is the main purpose of each and every service industry. This purpose is, often, forgotten by the profit-oriented common approach. However, it has been shown that employees satisfaction leads to satisfied and loyal customers, generating at least the same amount of growth and profit (Hunker, 2014).

In a sector where competition is fierce and the differentiation factor has a lot to talk about, the employee's attitude towards all the situations faced at work is fundamental to be the best, so that the employee becomes the agent of a good dissemination of the image of the service, the institution, and the quality of service it provides to each of the clients. The attitude is the basis for customer satisfaction, before, during, and after the provision of the service.

Being a service intangible and inseparable, it is difficult to create attributes for optimization, because it will always be subjective to the customer's perception of the experience.

The satisfaction of the customer generates his loyalty and the dissemination. Attracting new customers can also be an accomplished goal upon such commitment to quality and customer satisfaction. The attitude of employees, thus, can never be underestimated, as they are an active part, if not the leading element, of this process (Wampande & Osunsan, 2020).

The perception of customer satisfaction is the recognition of the good work of the employees and the service, the appreciation they have for the environment, service, and employees, and the possibility of a second experience.

3.4.1. MEDIATION AND MODERATION

During the theoretical model study process, the method for verifying the existence of a possible mediation (through the "Empowerment" variable) to explain customer satisfaction was used: the hypotheses " $IM \rightarrow E \rightarrow CS$ " and " $L \rightarrow E \rightarrow CS$ " were studied in order to understand the real value of Empowerment in explaining the indirect relationship between IM and CS, and L and CS. The results are present later in the paper, in the **Results** chapter (**Table 9**). This study was found useful in explaining the importance of empowered workers in their work behavior and overall customer satisfaction.

As for the moderating effect, a hypothesis " $IM \times L \rightarrow CS$ " was created, the results of which proved interesting to analyze. The importance of empowered leadership was questioned in its relationship with customer satisfaction when career progression increased. The existence of pyramid career growth in hospitality, and the fact that there is a great impact of seasonality in the way employees and customers are dealt with at different times of the year (always depending on the position of the job and contract of the employees) may affect the way the customer feels or not the leadership roles in the company more or less present in their satisfaction. This may translate into a drop in importance in explaining customer satisfaction.

4. METHODOLOGY

This paper was carried out with the theoretical support of some recognized scientific papers, some of them published in the best international journals. This paper methodology followed the theoretical support of the “Effects of High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) on Hospitality Employees’ Outcomes through Their Organizational Commitment, Motivation, and Job Satisfaction”, by Dorta-Afonso et al. (2021). The model was thought to become another interpretation of the previously mentioned author’s study. This model was developed for the purpose of writing this scientific paper and was based on the creation of variables such as Empowerment, Leadership and Customer Satisfaction. The Internal Mobility variable from the study conducted by Dorta-Afonso et al. (2021) was used.

It was decided to collect data from random locations around the world, but with the concern that the respondents would be workers in the hospitality and tourism industry. The study was thus restricted to this specific sector of economic activity.

The data was obtained by a questionnaire answered by employees working in the hospitality industry. Hospitality industry is composed by different economic segments, and they were all included in this study, in order to achieve the more accurate results possible. Food and Beverage sector (i.e., restaurants and bars), Travel and Tourism (i.e., buses, cabs, planes, ships, and trains), Lodging (i.e., hotels, hostels, motels, and Airbnb), and Recreation (i.e., any activity that people do for rest, relaxation, and enjoyment).

Then, it was assessed PLS-SEM results of the measurement and structured model. It was done various advanced PLS-SEM analyses, and the results were interpreted in order to write the discussion and draw the conclusions of the present article. The **Figure 2** shows the methodological process:

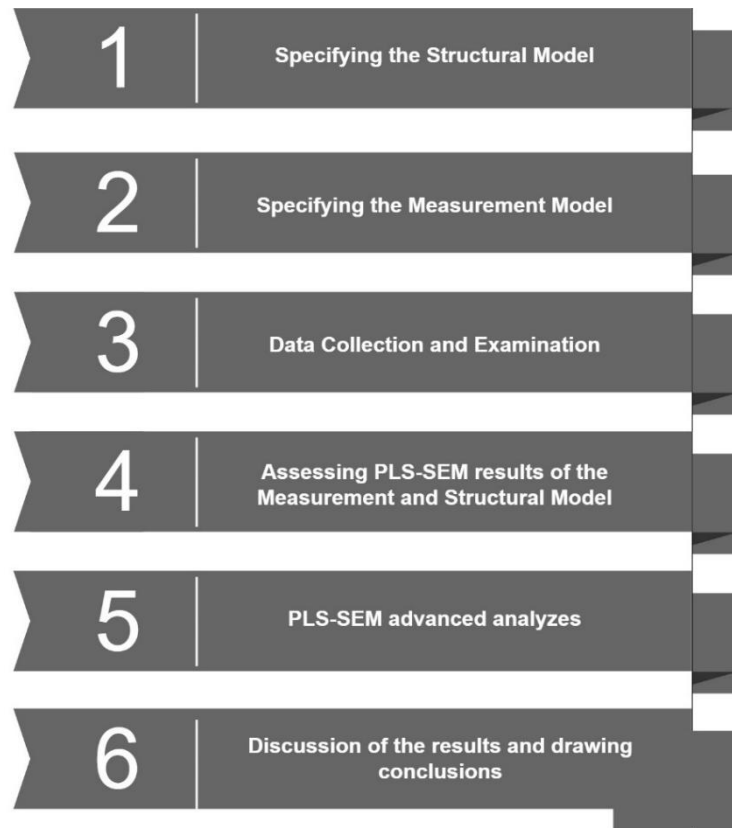


Figure 2 – Methodological Process for applying PLS-SEM
Adapted from: Hair et al. (2017)

4.1. DATA COLLECTION - MEASURES

Data collection began in the second semester of 2021. The questionnaire was administrated to various places around Portugal and some specific hotels around Europe. Firstly, it was released into a closed segment of people spreading it into a bigger scale of hospitality related employees. In this study, it was measured employees' concerns answers about different variables resulting in an analysis of their satisfaction and the customers'. The results of this first data collection were not the best. Perhaps due to the number of responses (250 at the time) or because of the breadth that the questions showed in terms of interpretation and/ or responses from people not employed in the industry, people who responded randomly. Thus, the process was immediately stopped in order to

re-evaluate the items that were being studied. The questions asked were rectified in a more explicit and robust manner. The questionnaire was again released to collect new data. One step backwards to take two steps forwards.

In the dataset under analysis, there were no missing values, or outliers (both critical elements using PLS-SEM method) (Hair et al., 2015). Therefore, it was not necessary to proceed with responses removals or apply any imputation procedures. The data size was never a huge problem, since at this time they were collected 744 responses, showing good fitting results, from hospitality and tourism workers around the globe. Although it was firstly set to have at least ten times the number of paths, directed at a particular construct in the model (Hair et al., 2014). According to Ali et al. (2018), when the research falls on hospitality and tourism, the distribution of the data and the size of the collection must be considered. A large deviation between the collected data can lead to an increase in bootstrapping errors, which results in a loss of statistical power.

The questionnaire was developed to measure all the constructs, and items were selected according to the literature review. It was discussed with a specialized professor about the validity of the measures, always using as baseline items that had already been used in former scientific articles, for the same variables in similar studies. Therefore, respondents had to rate each item on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = “Extremely dissatisfied”/ “Definitely not” and 7 = “Extremely satisfied”/ “Definitely yes”).

4.2. DATA COLLECTION – SAMPLE RESULTS

As stated earlier, this study was based on the study of responses from employees in hospitality and tourism from around the world. The sample was collected through the Amazon Mechanical Turk platform (Amazon Web Services). A total of 744 valid responses were collected, according to requirements established to the users/respondants on the platform:

- At least 50 responses accepted on the platform.
- And, to have an approval rate above 98%.

A profile study of the respondents was conducted, in terms of frequency and percentage of response, regarding the control variables: Age, Gender, Educational Level and Role in

the organization (**Table 3**). There are more male employees (51.2%) and the majority of participants aged between 20 and 40 (62.4%) in the collected sample. Most of the employees questioned have a bachelor's or master's degree (49.2% and 43.2%, respectively). Furthermore, most work full-time and at a basic level of the organization's hierarchy (61.4%), followed by high and medium level supervisors (16.8%).

Background variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
20-30 years old	242	32.53
31-40 years old	222	29.84
41-50 years old	182	24.46
51-60 years old	74	9.95
Above 60 years old	24	3.23
Gender		
Male	381	51.21
Female	361	48.52
Non-binary	2	0.27
Educational Level		
Less than High School	1	0.13
High School Graduate	41	5.51
Undergraduate	366	49.19
Master's Degree	321	43.15
Doctorate	13	1.75
Prefer not to say	2	0.27
Role		
High and medium level supervisors	125	16.80
Basic level supervisors	87	11.69
Basic level employees (full-time)	457	61.42
Internship	75	10.08

Table 3 – Profile of the respondents (n = 744)

4.3. DATA ANALYSIS

The hypotheses were tested through structural equation modelling (SEM), due to the willing of analyzing the relationships between latent and observed variables. Following the suggested procedures from different hospitality papers, using the PLS-SEM method, the model assessment was conducted using Smart PLS software. Furthermore, the data was treated in IBM SPSS Statistics version 28.0.

The PLS-SEM technique was employed by the following reasons (Ali et al., 2018; Hair et al., 2018):

1. the capacity to handle small sample size data (however, larger sample sizes increase the precision – i.e., consistency – of PLS-SEM estimations (Hair et al., 2015);
2. it works well with non-normal data (nonparametric method);
3. it is accurate when assessing a theoretical framework from a prediction perspective.

5. RESULTS

PLS-SEM predicts partial model structures by linking principal component analysis with least squares regressions (Hair et al., 2018). As the previous article states, the use of this method (PLS-SEM) is based on the following factors:

- it relies on exploratory research for theory development;
- it allows to restrict the sample size (e.g., research of hotel and tourism employees), but PLS-SEM also works very well with large sample sizes;
- it runs well when distributional issues are a concern, such as lack of normality;
- it is a distinct method when the research requires latent variable scores for follow-up analyzes; and
- it is applied when the analysis is concerned with testing a theoretical framework from a prediction perspective and when the structural model is complex with many constructs, indicators and/ or relationships.

The analysis and interpretation of a statistical model throughout PLS-SEM requires a two-stage approach: Measurement model analysis and Structural model analysis.

Measurement model analysis assess the reliability and validity of the constructs presented in the model in study – in a factor calculation. And Structural model analysis assess the relationship (in a path calculation) between the variables presented. The software chosen to study the model was “SmartPls”, 3.0 version, by its particularity of combining both assessments on the same model, while no other else can provide it.

5.1. MEASUREMENT MODEL ANALYSIS

For an evaluation of the reflective measurement model, it is necessary to calculate the reliability and validity of the constructs. The evaluation of the reflective measurement model includes the evaluation of measurement reliability (the indicator reliability and internal consistency – individual and composite reliability, respectively) and validity (convergent and discriminant validity) (Ali et al., 2018).

5.1.1. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Reliability means consistency between items in the model study and accuracy in the validity of items. Usaklis & Kucukergins’ paper (2018) was very helpful in the process,

regarding the measurement model study, contributing with scientific input to ensure the correct thresholds for model analysis. Indicator reliability is measured by the loadings (which refers to the contribution of each indicator variable – these values should not only be significant but also higher than 0.7). Internal consistency reliability is measured by three components: Cronbach's Alpha (CA), rho_A (pA) and Composite Reliability (CR).

The convergent validity, based on which the items converge to explain the variable, is measured by Average Variance Extract (AVE) – threshold should be greater than 0.50, meaning that the items are converging to represent the variable.

Firstly, individual reliability was assessed, and it was observed all indicator loadings in their corresponding constructs – all of them exceeded 0.760 threshold, guaranteeing that all indicators explain at least 50% of the variance of the construct.

Secondly, it was evaluated the reliability of each construct: CA enhance the measurement of the reliability of the constructs through its items, and should have a threshold, generally presented in scientific research, as greater than 0.70, since it assumes that all items are equally reliable (Ali et al., 2018). CR should be greater than 0.70 or, at least, as a limit, should present values near 0.500, which corroborate with convergent validity. The pA measures the reliability, as an indicator that is a combination of both CA and CR (leading most researchers to talk just on this one). Therefore, it is clear that the first-order measurement scales are reliable.

Finally, it was studied each construct convergent validity. Or how the items converge to explain the construct, and that can be observed on the AVE values. **Table 4** shows the results of both reliability and validity analyzes.

Constructs/ Indicators	Outer Loadings	CA	pA	CR	AVE
Internal Mobility (IM)		0.813	0.821	0.889	0.727
IM1	0.873***				
IM2	0.830***				
IM3	0.855***				
Empowerment (E)		0.722	0.773	0.835	0.629
E1	0.760***				
E2	0.782***				
E3	0.835***				
Leadership (L)		0.781	0.791	0.872	0.694
L1	0.857***				
L2	0.822***				
L3	0.819***				
Customer Satisfaction (CS)		0.735	0.736	0.883	0.791
CS1	0.894***				
CS2	0.884***				

Note: *** p-value < 0.001

Table 4 – Measurement model assessment: reliability and convergent validity

To complete the evaluation of the measurement model analysis, its discriminant validity (the second type of validity) was analyzed. Discriminant validity is about distinguishing constructs. These validation criteria can be represented in three ways: Fornell-Lacker Criterion, Cross-loading, and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. However, it is most often represented by the Fornell-Lacker Criterion and HTMT alone. The cross-loading interpretation is used when there are discriminating issues (redundant items).

The discriminant validity was analyzed also by Fornell-Lacker Criterion, where can be seen that the square root of the AVE of each construct (see the diagonal in italics in Table 5) was higher than the correlations between the other constructs (represented below of the italics values) (Henseler et al., 2015). **Table 5** shows the Fornell-Lacker Criterion:

	CS	IM	E	L
CS	<i>0.889</i>			
IM	0.706	<i>0.853</i>		
E	0.689	0.718	<i>0.793</i>	
L	0.759	0.811	0.718	<i>0.833</i>

CS: Customer Satisfaction; IM: Internal Mobility; E: Empowerment; L: Leadership

Table 5 – Fornell-Lacker Criterion – discriminant validity assessment

Further, the HTMT (i.e., the ratio of hetero-retract-monotrack correlations) contrasts the correlations of indicators that measure different constructs with the correlations of indicators measuring the same construct. Normally, scientific papers and researchers establish 0.85 or 0.9 as the limit threshold, in order to recognize its heterogeneity. However, according to Sarstedt et al. (2022) when the constructs being compared are conceptually similar (e.g., cognitive, and emotional satisfaction), a threshold of 0.90 or even closer to 1 can be used. Therefore, the proposed model exhibits discriminant validity, which means that the constructs are different from each other. **Table 6** shows the results of the HTMT analysis:

	CS	IM	E	L
CS				
IM	0.908			
E	0.878	0.878		
L	0.995	1.008	0.891	

Table 6 – HTMT – discriminant validity assessment

Cross loading is used to understand discriminant validity issues among constructs (using each of its items): they should explain better its own construct instead of others (when it occurs, discriminant validity is established). The difference on explaining the own construct or another should be greater than 0.10; the greater the difference the better the discriminant validity of each item in explaining the own construct (Hair et al., 2014). That can be seen in **Table 7**:

	Customer Satisfaction	Internal Mobility	Empowerment	Leadership
CS1	0.894	0.633	0.649	0.674
CS2	0.884	0.623	0.575	0.675
IM1	0.661	0.873	0.684	0.757
IM2	0.572	0.830	0.557	0.636
IM3	0.564	0.855	0.584	0.673
E1	0.445	0.427	0.760	0.426
E2	0.369	0.483	0.782	0.469
E3	0.726	0.719	0.835	0.728
L1	0.693	0.739	0.692	0.857
L2	0.594	0.625	0.547	0.822
L3	0.599	0.653	0.540	0.819

Table 7 – Cross-Loadings: discriminant validity assessment

5.2. STRUCTURAL MEASUREMENT MODEL

Having established the reliability and validity of outer (measurement) model, the next step in PLS-SEM addresses the assessment of inner (structural) model: collinearity; explained variance of endogenous variable; predictive relevance; effect sizes; significance and relevant paths coefficients; and the model fit (Usakli & Kucukergin, 2018).

When analyzing the structural model, it is necessary to evaluate whether there were collinearity issues between the antecedent variables of the dependent (endogenous) construct. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is a measure of the amount of multicollinearity in a set of multiple regression variables. Collinearity arises when two

indicators are highly correlated, and among latent variables are assessed through VIF. According to Dorta-Afonso et al. (2021), VIF greater than 3, indicates a potential collinearity problem. Therefore, and according to Hair et al. (2018), VIF values should be close to 3 or lower. Results in **Table 8** show that there were no collinearity problems. However, the same author noted that VIF values should be less than 5, in articles written about the hotel/ tourism industry and marketing (Hair et al., 2012; Hair et al., 2017).

Further, and following the steps from the last research, the assessment of structural model, which enable to determine the model's capability to predict one or more target construct, requires the examination of three elements: path coefficients, R^2 value (coefficient of determination), and Q^2 values (blindfolding and predictive relevance – cross-validated redundancy). Structural model was assessed for overall explanatory power of constructs through R^2 values, predictive relevance through Q^2 values and path coefficient β -values.

After using the bootstrapping method in SmartPLS, version 3.0, to expand the existing data to 10.000 subsamples (Streukens & Leroi-Werelds, 2016), the following **Table 8** shows the structural model assessment – direct effects:

Relationship		Path Coefficient (β -value)	Sample Mean	T-Value	P-Value	Confidence Interval		Inner VIF Value
						5.0%	95.0%	
Direct Effects								
IM $\rightarrow$ E	H1	0.395***	0.396***	7.750	0.000	0.311	0.479	2.923
IM $\rightarrow$ CS	H2	0.112*	0.116*	1.823	0.068	0.011	0.214	3.747
L $\rightarrow$ E	H3	0.398***	0.400***	7.953	0.000	0.317	0.481	2.923
L $\rightarrow$ CS	H4	0.403***	0.400***	7.779	0.000	0.315	0.487	3.562
E $\rightarrow$ CS	H5	0.287***	0.287***	6.612	0.000	0.217	0.363	2.527
IM X L $\rightarrow$ CS		- 0.050**	- 0.047**	2.262	0.024	- 0.078	- 0.007	1.731

Note: 10 000 subsamples; *** p-value < 0.001; ** p-value < 0.05; * p-value < 0.1

Table 8 – Structural model assessment – direct effects

From the outset, we can observe from **Table 8** that hypotheses “H1”, “H2”, “H4”, “H5” are statistically significant, in a study where the level of significance used was 5.0%, as the t-value threshold for 5% alpha level would be 1.96 for a two sided test (with different p-values). However, hypothesis “H2” is moderately significant (p-value <0.1). Meaning that the relationship between IM and CS is not that significant as the others, having a p-value > 0.05 (p-value = 0.068) and a t-value less than 1.96 (Hair et al., 2014).

All other latent variables are statistically significant. They present t-value values greater than 1.96, and confirm hypotheses 1, 2, 4 and 5. The latent variable that best explains “Customer Satisfaction” is “Leadership”, with a $\beta = 0.403$ ($p < 0.01$). Which means that when the value increases in “Leadership” by one standardized unit, it also increases by 0.403 standardized units the “Customer Satisfaction” (Santos, n.d.). In addition, when bootstrapping is calculated with a 5% significance level and $n = 10.000$ subsamples, H4 decreases its path coefficient to 0.400 – still the most significant hypothesis, along with “leadership → Empowerment”.

In order to analyze the mediation type, the following **Table 9** shows the structural model assessment – indirect effects:

Relationships	Path Coefficient (β -value)	Sample Mean	T-Value	P-Value	Confidence Interval	
					5.0%	95.0%
Indirect Effects						
IM $\rightarrow$ E $\rightarrow$ CS	0.113****	0.114****	5.186	0.000	0.074	0.160
L $\rightarrow$ E $\rightarrow$ CS	0.114****	0.115****	4.876	0.000	0.074	0.165

Note: 10 000 subsamples; *** p-value < 0.001

Table 9 – Structural model assessment – indirect effects

The **Table 9** shows the indirect effects between the variables and the mediator "Empowerment". Both with very high statistical relevance (p-value < 0.001). Regarding the relationship "IM $\rightarrow$ E $\rightarrow$ CS": given that the direct relationship between IM and CS does not show a rather strong level of significance (p-value = 0.068, although it is less than 0.1 - percentage used for the study of this variable in the model), if H2 is assumed as null hypothesis, there is a full mediation effect of Empowerment (Sheko & Spaho, 2018). On the other hand, if we decide that the significance is sufficient for the purpose of the study, then there is a complementary mediation (partial mediation) (because the β -value is positive) (Zhao et al., 2010). As for the relationship "L $\rightarrow$ E $\rightarrow$ CS": there is partial mediation of "Empowerment", whereby the indirect effect is significant as well as the direct effect. When the path coefficient of the direct effect of the relationship is found to be positive complementary mediation (or partial mediation) is established (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Regarding the predictive power of the model, defined by R^2 values, the literature establishes that values of 0.75, 0.50, 0.25, represent substantial, moderate, and weak power, respectively (Usakli & Kucukergin, 2018). The R^2 obtained throughout this model studied demonstrates the overall explanatory power of the constructs Empowerment and Customer Satisfaction. Which, according to **Table 10** and **Figure 3**, a moderate predictive power of the model existed, leading to an explanation of 56.9% and 63.3% (Empowerment and Customer Satisfaction, respectively) of the variance (Kurdi et al., 2020).

Constructs	R^2	Results
Empowerment	0.569	Moderate
Customer Satisfaction	0.633	Moderate

Note: 10 000 subsamples

Table 10 – R^2 results of the exogenous variables

5.3. PREDICTIVE RELEVANCE

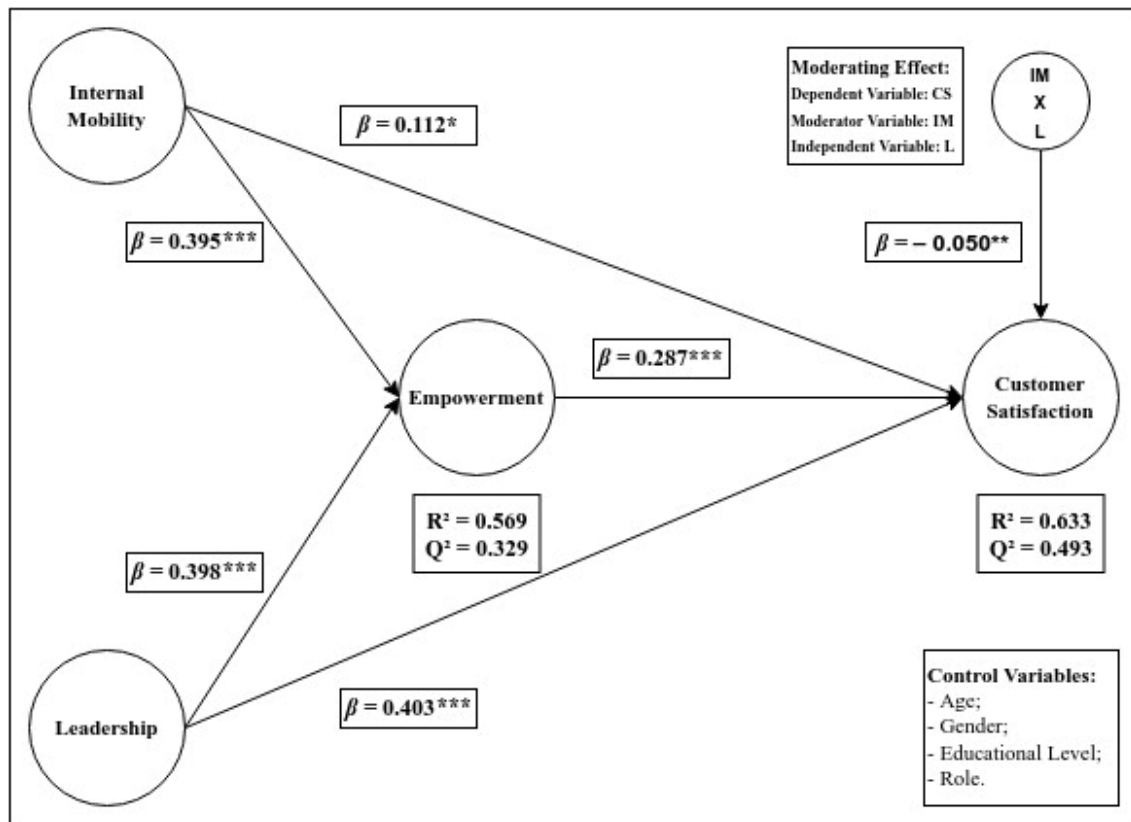
The Q^2 cross-validation redundancy values explain the model's predictive relevance, and to assess it the blindfolding method was applied. To be satisfactory, must be higher than 0 (Ali et al., 2018). The Q^2 values of this model are 0.329 in Empowerment variable and 0.493 in Customer Satisfaction variable, which supports the underlying assumption of this study, that the dependent constructs ("Empowerment" and "Customer Satisfaction") involved in this study have strong predictive relevance (Farooq et al., 2018).

Moreover, every construct was assessed for collinearity issue. Findings revealed that collinearity is not an issue for our study. Hence, overall predictive relevance for the proposed structural model is achieved. It can be observed in **Table 11**.

	SSO	SSE	$Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)$
Customer Satisfaction	1488.000	753.761	0.493
Internal Mobility	2232.000	2232.000	
Empowerment	2232.000	1496.631	0.329
Leadership	2232.000	2232.000	

Table 11 – Cross-validation of the model constructs

Now, in the proposed model, all the values were confirmed within this condition, as **Figure 3** shows:



Note: 10 000 subsamples; *** p-value < 0.001; ** p-value < 0.05; * p-value < 0.1

Figure 3 – Results of the structural relationships among the model constructs

6. DISCUSSION

This paper provides empirical evidence that further supports the benefits of a good work basis for hospitality employees to improve their satisfaction, explores various pathways through which characteristics that are closely related to worker satisfaction and customer satisfaction empirically test the direct positive repercussions of service-user empowerment and satisfaction (Dorta-Afonso et al., 2021).

It is possible to observe through the assessment to the measurement model that all items were consistent in explaining each construct. **Table 4** shows that all outer loadings are above 0.7. Internal Consistency Validity is assessed by observing the three components: CA, pA and CR. All constructs were validated in terms of internal consistency. All indicators converged to explain the construct (all constructs had an AVE up or equal to 0.629, when all had to be above 0.5 to be validated). To conclude the assessment of the measurement model, the three possible types of representation were used to validate the discrimination between constructs (to verify that the constructs are not redundant in the model under study): Fornell-Lacker Criterion, HTMT and Cross Loadings. Although in older scientific literature the Fornell-Lacker Criterion has been widely used when analyzing PLS-SEM algorithm studies, current papers, like Sarstedt et al. (2022), state that the HTMT criterion is the most advisable (with thresholds set up to 0.9 in most cases, but in this type of case, satisfaction studies may have higher values) – leading this study to have a validation in terms of discriminant assessment. According to the evaluation of the results of the modeled structure, statistical significance was confirmed for all modeled hypotheses, although it should be noted that some relationships were studied from different significance levels. This is the case of the relationship between Internal Mobility and Customer Satisfaction (p-value < 0.1). With the calculation of a bootstrapping with 10 000 subsamples and a p-value less than 0.001 (1%), it was observed at **Table 8** that the relationship between Leadership and Empowerment (H3), and Leadership and Customer Satisfaction (H4) are those that represent a higher level of significance.

This study tested, in a model, the connection of characteristic elements of the employee – in terms of attitude, well-being, leadership, recognition, support, training, decision, opportunities (employee satisfaction) – in the hospitality sector. Based on the results

obtained through this research, these previous factors, when they exist, lead to an increase in customer appreciation and recognition of service quality (Customer Satisfaction).

According to the literature review of this paper, active and good leadership in an industry that manages people should be considered as a decisive element for satisfaction (Raub & Robert, 2013). H3 and H4, show that when a supervisor or leader uses his or her power to teach, inform, and care about the employees themselves, the employees feel empowered and this, in turn (and indirectly), leads to customer satisfaction, but directly results in the satisfaction of the people to whom the service is being provided. As cited throughout the paper Huertas-Valdivia et al. (2019) explains that when leadership takes an active role in empowering employees, the level of employee engagement increases. This increase in employee engagement and motivation results in less constraint in the pursuit of success. Employees feel appreciated and recognized. These feelings on the employee's behalf, improve their attitude and behavior during their professional life. In other words, these feelings of recognition and appreciation perceived are achieved from a good leadership that leaves the employees engaged and motivated with the company and daily service, which leads to an improvement in their personal and professional quality of life, but also has positive effects on the business outcomes - satisfaction, sales, and finally profit (Wampande & Osunsan, 2020). These are the hypotheses that best explain the model.

The hypothesis Internal Mobility and Employment (H1) was tested and also obtained a high statistical significance level, the fact that it is confirmed that there are opportunities in a company, generalizing, and that this increases the Empowerment of the staff working in the organization is not surprising. This strong relationship exists and the fact that it is confirmed serves as a sample that there are many organizations that do not offer this ability to move within the company, or to obtain training, in order to gain more know-how and feel that they are evolving, and that this type of management can cause a decrease in this Empowerment. Empowerment, which repeating a lot has to do with the commitment and motivation, state of mind, that an employee has in the organization.

The relationship between Empowerment and Customer Satisfaction turned out to be positive and extremely useful for the empirical study of the advantages that this relationship brings to the real world. The fact that H5 was validated and had a positive

and statistically significant effect leads us to believe that a company based on the values of empowering its own employees brings a greater probability that the service will be offered with higher quality. This quality, recognized and appreciated by the customer, leads us to conclude that people are in fact the greatest asset of every company: when satisfied, naturally (Heskett et al., 2008).

The question one might ask is: Why is hypothesis 2 (the relationship between Internal Mobility and Customer Satisfaction) still present from the beginning to the end of the modeling research? Because, according to the course of this investigation, a moderating variable (IM X L) was created: where the dependent variable is CS, the moderator variable is IM, and the independent variable is L. What was realized in bootstrapping the model was that the existence of the Internal Mobility variable affects the relationship between Leadership and Customer Satisfaction. Given the job rotation that exists in the hospitality industry (due to seasonality, frequent entries and exits, where the salary may be a factor that influences all these changes), the increase in employee satisfaction regarding career progression negatively influences the relationship between Leadership and Customer Satisfaction in the sense that career progression in the hospitality industry may be compromised by the pyramid growth (which shows that the time it takes for progression may be a preponderant factor in this mobility, although employees remain satisfied - because mobility exists), which consequently may lead to Leadership being constantly in rotation and a very low value or one that tends to fall in the relationship between variables means that there is no interaction between those variables (Arasli et al., 2020). In other words, leadership is no longer an immediate driver of Customer Satisfaction, as the constraints arising from these mobility factors within the company affect the way leaders relate to the customer - and thus there may be a loss of their influence on their relationship to customer satisfaction. If there is a low value regarding "Internal Mobility", the "Leadership" lost its importance in explaining "Customer Satisfaction" (β -value = - 0.050; p-value < 0.05).

Furthermore, it became very clear the paper of Empowerment by mediating the relationships towards Customer Satisfaction. It is really useful to understand that empowered employees become more willing to satisfy customers with their behavior (Li-Yun et al., 2007).

In the hospitality industry, as a service provider, when an employee is able to access new opportunities (whether through promotions, requesting career advancement, or training that qualifies them), this will mean that the relationship between leaders and customer satisfaction will be affected. Finally, the predictive significance of the dependent variables “Empowerment” and “Leadership” are greater than zero ($Q^2 > 0$), which gives this model extra reliability when the number of responses increases.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Many factors at the organizational and individual level influence the question of satisfaction. These include employee satisfaction, employee personality, and the work atmosphere (Wang et al., 2021).

According to the theory studied by Wong et al. (2019), once employees' efforts are recognized by their employing company, providing benefits and advancement opportunities, it will make them feel bound to be instrumental in contributing to the prosperity of their organization. Moreover, it states that an investment in the employees' future positively influences their decision to commit more to the employer, creating personal and affective bonds with the work they are performing. These factors were confirmed by the study in this paper. The empowerment of employees with factors that lead them to greater engagement also generates intrinsic satisfaction for the employee, which positively influences the organization as a consequence.

According to the data analysis, the age range that feels that their satisfaction depends on the company's support through training is present in the [31; 40] age range, followed by those over 60; strangely, or not, employees over 60 feel more satisfied with the possibility of being promoted and obtaining new opportunities for career advancement. On the other hand, employees between the ages of 31 and 40 also attach a great deal of importance to these factors, in order to be satisfied at their company. Although the average level of satisfaction perceived through the survey of hotel industry employees of all ages is set at 5.6 (the scale of measurement was between 1 and 7: 1 – “strongly disagree” and 7 – “strongly agree”. For a better understanding of these measures, see **Appendix A**). It is the female gender that agrees that career opportunities are definitive for feeling satisfied, although there is not such a significant difference for the male gender. The non-binary or third gender respondents should not be indicative of such a definitive or pragmatic analysis as there are only 2 people (0.27% of the total sample collected). All of these analyses are more present in employees who are high and medium level supervisors.

Moreover, it is the employees with less than high school education who feel that the opportunities, training, communicative and caring leadership, and the ability to make decisions without close supervision give them more satisfaction.

It was concluded that the items stipulated to explain the elements that promote internal mobility and good leadership have a great influence on employee empowerment (H1 and H3). The direct effects between leadership and customer satisfaction are evidently positive and significant with the sample under study (H4). However, the sample collected shows a less significance of the direct relationship between internal mobility and customer satisfaction (H2), leading to this hypothesis being considered with a higher threshold level of significance ($p\text{-value} = 0.1$) in this particular study (with the possibility of being improved in future research, since it logically makes sense).

In conclusion, empowerment has a direct and positive effect with customer satisfaction, as we can see through the literature review present in this paper. This relationship is justified by the fact that empowered employees with good organizational support can achieve an increase in overall customer satisfaction.

This paper should help alert management teams at the highest level of the factors that can actually make them look at people instead of profit. This human position is what we need, so that a world that has been going through a process of globalization and “wild capitalism” for many years can effectively be a place where working is fundamental for survival, but the question is how to do it for the benefit of people, and human needs. We should not hide only through numbers, we should always have one foot in the numbers and one foot on the ground, for better visualization of what is going on around us. The case of COVID-19, as well as, recently, the war in Ukraine scares us. It scares us because we are constantly in contact with the number of deaths, the economic recession percentages, the generalized rise in prices and the wages that do not follow this growth, etc. If the numbers don't exist, we can observe with more sensitivity and clarity what is really happening, who can we help, and how can we help, to make the world a better place for everyone. Even if it is only through the given concern to each situation and to each person, and the perception and results that this concern leads to.

8. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORKS

There are several research limitations regarding this particular study. The lack of information about the hospitality industry is the first. This is perhaps due to the fact that it is still somewhat of an emerging economic sector, with many studies being done to understand how organizational justice and culture keeps up with the changing needs of customers. Thus, there is one main limitation that was certainly encountered. Measuring the effectiveness of this study empirically is very difficult, and at this stage it has only modulated a possibility of relationships between constructs that seek to understand how their impact on customer satisfaction can be predicted, since it was not possible to apply it directly to a functioning business. With these positive results, and the discovery of new relationships it can be applied in the real world in future research, so that it can contribute to the improvement of the industry and an advance in knowledge. Having used a self-made questionnaire, albeit based on scientific articles, and sought answers on a platform where all subscribers could respond, I have to trust that the requirements that were requested were received positively. The requirements were that the questionnaire should only be answered by workers in the hospitality industry. For future studies, I propose to use this model with secondary data or seek to make sure that only respondents who meet the proposed requirements are the sample under study, perhaps by an *in loco* collection.

Another limitation is that the used sample was a non-probabilistic sample taken by convenience and, as such, does not allow the generalizability of the obtained results, since the sampling process does not guarantee the representativeness of the sample. The conclusions drawn are consequently applicable solely to the studied sample but can be seen as exploratory tips for future work (Santos, n.d.).

A further recommendation would be to split this model into two separate ones, one that studies worker satisfaction and another that studies a sample of customers who have been in contact with these workers, so that the sample increases its level of reliability and significance. It would also be interesting to study this type of model with secondary data obtained through organizations such as labor unions and/or political organizations (e.g., in Portugal - Turismo de Portugal).

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10. APPENDIX

10.1. APPENDIX A – QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear participant,

My name is José Maria Didier. I am a Data-driven Marketing, with a specialization in science master's student, and the survey I am conducting will be extremely important for my thesis dissertation.

This dissertation will try to analyze which implications are connected towards customer satisfaction. For that, I will be studying the employees' work conditions in the hospitality industry.

The purpose of this survey is to collect some information on your satisfaction as an employee. If I understand the reasons behind this satisfaction, I will be able to conclude whether work conditions are really connected to customer satisfaction.

This survey will only take 3 to 4 minutes. Your feedback will be used to help improving employee work experiences and consequently the customer experience.

Informed Consent Form

I declare that I was informed that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I can leave this survey at any time without penalty, and all data is confidential. I understand that this study does not offer serious risks

I accept to participate in this survey:

☐ Yes

☐ No

Skip To: End of Survey If Informed Consent Form I declare that I was informed that my participation in this study is volunt... = No

The **Table 12** describes all questions asked to the hospitality industry employees:

Constructs	Question
Age	
Gender	
Educational Level	Demographic indicators
Role	
	Please rank the degree to which you agree in each statement, where 1 means “Strongly Disagree”, and 7 means “Strongly Agree”
Internal Mobility	
IM1	The company provides me with real opportunities for promotions.
IM2	The company allows me to ask for advancements.
IM3	I have the training support I need from my organization.
Empowerment	
E1	My supervisors are supportive.
E2	In my work, I am free to develop my own initiatives and make decisions by myself.
E3	I am satisfied with my job content.
Leadership	
L1	My leadership has coaching skills.
L2	My leadership has communication skills.
L3	My leadership shows concern.
Customer Satisfaction	
CS1	Customers recognize the employees’ satisfaction.
CS2	Customers appreciate the employees’ good practices.

Note: Demographic Indicators presented below this Table

Table 12 – Research questionnaire

Demographic Indicators

Age

- ☐ Below 20 years old
- ☐ 21-30 years old
- ☐ 31-40 years old
- ☐ 41-50 years old
- ☐ 51-60 years old
- ☐ Above 60 years old

Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary/ third gender
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Educational level

- ☐ Less than high school
- ☐ High school graduate
- ☐ Undergraduate
- ☐ Master's Degree
- ☐ Doctorate
- ☐ Prefer not to say

What is your role in the hospitality industry?

- ☐ High and medium level supervisors
- ☐ Basic level supervisors
- ☐ Basic level employees (full-time)
- ☐ Part-time employees
- ☐ Internship

