

# THE ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT COORDINATOR: LEADERSHIP AND SUPERVISION

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**Abstract:** *With greater autonomy schools require assertive leadership in school management. Thus, it is crucial to understand the intermediate manager's role in guiding a curriculum department, seeking to know how to validate their skills within the team. The department is shown functional, organized and communicative. Coordinator is spokesperson, democratic manager and performs duties within a framework of collaboration and valorisation, with joint decision and validation. Leadership is democratic and supervision relies on support for teachers and the figure of case manager emerges. Relevant constraints include bureaucracy and resistance to change. Functions in inclusive education, leadership, pedagogical supervision and in democratic, pedagogical, collaborative and mediating management are envisaged.*

**Keywords:** *Intermediate management, Department coordinator, Leadership, Supervision.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The intermediate management structures, such as the curricular departments, are fundamental for the implementation of the different projects of the school, such as the PE (Educational Project) and the PAA (Annual Plan of Activities), crossing the role of the CDC (Curriculum Department Coordinator) with that of the other actors for the school's curriculum matrix to work. From this perspective, it is essential a great articulation between the departments, centered on *the currícula*, and the class councils, focused on the specificity of the classes (Santos et al., 2010). For these authors, strong and transformational leadership is crucial to the success of the school as an organization, which translates into an integrated vision of the school and the educational community, that is motivating and motivated and that develops management processes appropriate to the concrete needs and challenges of the school. Thus, a leading interim manager should have a unifying view of the efforts of all teachers he coordinates and points out paths to excellence, inclusion and diversity. It is therefore urgent to implement teamwork.

The intermediate manager has an important role in boosting teamwork, which will result in an improvement in the quality of the service provided by the school, so it should create conditions for the accomplishment of this work in a climate of permanent challenge and questioning. In the legislative building Portuguese the figure of the CDC emerges with new and renewed roles, re-focusing it within the school. Legal diplomas establish cultures of shared responsibility and the emergence of strong leaders. The CDC position is new in terms of teacher professional development. In this legal framework, it is urgent to understand how teachers perceive the leadership and supervision of the CDC.

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It is intended to understand how the skills of the school manager are validated within the team. Its general objective is to understand the role and competencies of the intermediate school manager in the guidance of a curricular department and as specific objectives, identify the functions and / or competencies performed by the department coordinator, recognize the characteristics that mirror their performance and identify the responsibilities assumed, difficulties and / or constraints in the exercise of the position. We opted for a descriptive and exploratory case study of an Alentejo AE, with a mixed approach. We applied a questionnaire survey to teachers, conducted semi-structured interviews with CDC and consulted official documents.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. School as an organization and its implications**

Many studies in school administration show concern about the distinction between school as an institution and organization, and then one of the perspectives is chosen. The first refers to the social, cultural and axiological dimensions of education, exercised by educational interactions between generations (Almeida, 2005). These dimensions are realized in the school as an organization. Castro (2010) argues that the school as an organization is based on relationships of interdependence and interaction between the various educational actors, which lead to a great complexity, poured into each of its elements, already complex. Bucha (2009) argues that the school is an educational organization, living, inserted in a system of interactions between educational actors and the curriculum.

### **2.2. School autonomy and intermediate management**

Today's Portuguese school is a social organization that brings together people in mutual interaction through particular organizational structures and processes that aim to achieve common educational objectives. On the other hand, changes in society require schools to be more able to reflect on their role and to have effective responses to respond to increasingly heterogeneous audiences in diverse contexts. In this way they can make use of their growing autonomy to respond and build their uniqueness and identity of the projects (Fialho & Cid, 2011) and, we add, the identity of the school itself, to be the strongest link in the community where it is inserted.

### **2.3. Department coordinator: leader and supervisor**

According to Canas (2011), the coordinators have an increased importance in the curricular articulation, in the organization, in the monitoring, in the realization and evaluation of the activities of the classes or groups of students, contributing decisively to the improvement of the students' learning and the quality of the school.

One of the functions is to contribute to combating the predictors of school failure by establishing the mentor figure of the CDC.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

In a first phase of the study, we proceeded, as Fernandes (2002) assures us, to the bibliographical research of specialty books, articles and published studies related to the theme of empirical research. To answer the starting question and achieve the proposed objectives, we defined the methodological *design* of our study.

We chose a mixed approach, qualitative and quantitative in nature. The first allows us to know the individual perceptions of teachers (Bell, 2004) and the second, from the perspective of Innocent and Resendes (2014), translates an added value for research.

Our methodological choice for a complementary qualitative approach with quantitative approach does not diminish the scientificity of the study because, as Bogdan and Biklen (2013) assure us, qualitative research meets the requirements of scientific research, since they are based on empirical and systematic analysis of data. We intend to describe and understand the meanings constructed by the educational actors in their natural environment, to reveal the lived reality, which is multiple and dynamic and, thus, interpret social processes using reflexive and critical analysis of the narratives of the real as advocated by Silva (2013).

In our study we used the strategy of the descriptive case study, with the purpose of describing, explaining or exploring (Yin, 1994, 2001, 2009) or analyzing, problematizing the observed context to build knowledge (Ponte, 2006).

### **3.1. Data collection and analysis tools**

Considering the triangulation of methodologies (Stake, 2016; Innocent & Resendes, 2014) stated, we chose the questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews as the fundamental techniques of data collection complemented with the documental analysis of structuring documents of the life of the SE.

After the survey of the state of the art, through the review of the literature on the subject, poured into the theoretical framework, we proceeded to the design, validation and administration of a questionnaire to obtain data and the construction of the interview script. Finally, the collected data are analyzed, processed and explained in the light of the theoretical framework.

The mixed approach, method, techniques and sources of information selected seemed to be the ones indicated for the empirical study in question, since it occurred in a real and specific context, facilitating the collection of data to sustain it.

### **3.2. Study participants**

To carry out our research it became necessary to delimit the field of analysis. In the wake of Quivy and Campenhoudt (2003:157), in addition to the data to be collected, it is imperative to *„circumscribe the field of empirical analyses in space, geographical and social, and in time”*. In order to avoid errors we chose a field of analysis circumscribed to curricular departments of a 2/3rd cycle and secondary AE.

Twelve teachers were interviewed by questionnaire and three coordinators were interviewed. The interviews after recording were transcribed following the advice of Amado (2014). Educators and teachers of the first cycle were not part of the study, since the departments are composed of teachers from the same teaching group, which keeps them away from the purposes of the study.

### **3.3. Data processing**

For Amado (2014) data analysis is central in research and it is crucial to analyse and interpret them, starting with organizing them.

**Table 1.** Matrix of categories of interviews to coordinators

Categories	Subcategories
Composition, organization and functioning of the curricular department	Adequacy according to disciplinary groups
	Affinities between recruitment groups
	Adequacy of the size to carry out the work
	Organization of the department
	Functioning of the department
	Contribution of teachers to the functioning of the department
Communication in the department	Communication processes in the department
	Communication rules
	Interaction between departments
	Mobilization of teachers
	Communicational climate
	Knowledge of information
	Communication feedback
Coordinator's choice	Selection criteria
	Most important criteria
	Selection method
Coordinator's roles/competencies	Coordination of pedagogical procedures
	Department management
	Ways of acting
	Delegation of competences
	Curricular articulation
	Inclusive education
	Pedagogical supervision
Performance evaluation	
Exercise of the post of coordinator	Leadership
	Training
	Intermediate management
	Pedagogical supervision
	Pedagogical coordination
Leadership practices	Types of leadership
	Conflict management
	Teacher follow-up
	Participation of teachers
	Performance of the coordinator
Supervisory practices	Supervision of pedagogical practice
	Monitoring, guidance and monitoring of the activity of teachers
	Professional development
Performance evaluation practices	Intervention in performance evaluation
	Delegation of competences
	Identification of performance evaluation dimensions
	Formative evaluation
Obstacles/constraints in the exercise of office	Typology of obstacles
	Specialised training
	Responsibilities assumed
Future prospects for the exercise of the position	Own career
	Emergence of new functions and new roles
	Leadership
	Supervision and performance evaluation
	Specialised training
	Time limitation
	New forms of management
Method of election	

Source: Own elaboration.

Quantitative data were recorded and treated using simple descriptive statistics using Excel software and qualitative data were subject to the content analysis technique that allows the comparison between the theoretical framework and the empirical data collected, being a flexible and adaptable technique to research (Amado, 2014).

From the content analysis performed, the significant elements of the interviews emerged, which allowed them to be assigned a systematic character, looking for patterns, phrases and events that would allow the development of a system of categories of codification of the most relevant data, poured into categories or subcategories, to facilitate reading, depending on the objectives of the investigation and the theoretical framework (Bogdan & Biklen, 2013).

We chose the mixed procedure to analyse the content of the interviews made to the department coordinators and in the conduct of them we follow the script built by us, being located in the closed procedure.

#### 4. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

It is a good thing to say that this is a small, non-exhaustive research study that portrays a small organic unit, so our results can serve as a starting point for other empirical investigations, in other contexts and with other educational actors.

In the course of the study we noticed that there are other areas that deserve to be deepened, such as inclusive education and curricular flexibility, which is now on the agenda. However, we think we have made a small contribution in the study of curriculum departments on leadership and pedagogical supervision.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

In this study we intend to understand the role and competencies of the intermediate school manager in the orientation of a curricular department. Thus, we seek to identify the functions and competencies performed by the coordinator, recognize the characteristics that mirror his/her performance and identify the responsibilities and constraints found in the exercise of the position. This intermediate manager, cornerstone in the school, coordinates curricular departments, object of study of our research in an AE. This is a case study, with a mixed approach, and qualitative data were collected, through interviews and official and quantitative documents, using a questionnaire applied to teachers to answer the starting question, *„how are the skills of the intermediate school manager validated within the team?“*.

The coordinators assume responsibilities in the coordination and democratic management of the department, promoting participation, interdisciplinarity, collaborative work among teachers and transmitting information in a timely manner. The pedagogical work is essentially the responsibility of the disciplinary groups led by the respective group delegates.

They assume the functions stipulated in the guiding documents, such as coordination, evaluation and definition of the learning profile of students, curricular flexibility and articulation, inclusive education, communication and discussion of school results.

At the leadership level, the study showed that the coordinators exhibit a democratic and participatory style, characterized as collaborative and mediating. There are bureaucratic focuses, which indicates that intermediate managers choose a style depending on the needs and circumstances. Pedagogical leadership, free of bureaucratic tasks, is essentially attributed to group delegates.

In the exercise of the position, they encounter constraints such as lack of time, bureaucracy, supervision, performance evaluation and conflict management. The high number of competencies to be exercised and the requirement of a high degree of knowledge of the legislation as well as the resistance of teachers to change and introduced dynamics are other constraints.

The future prospects for the exercise of the position are: knowing how to lead educational teams and foster collaborative work; increase democratic management; remain a spokesperson between the department and school bodies; have more hours to hold the position and manage the department based on pedagogical aspects, aiming at improving school results. As Silva and Santos (2018) tell us, an autonomous, democratic and participatory school contributes to the form of critical and reflective citizens.

We hope that the results of our study will encourage processes of democratic management participated in schools, agencies and the structures that compose it.

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