



# Interview – Sara Sousa (Portocargo)

## WP 2

### Activity 1 (Leaders Interview)

Developed by University of Aveiro | July, 2025

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## Interview Metadata

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Date of Interview:	26 July 2025
Interviewer Name:	Filipa Brandão & Marlene Amorim - University of Aveiro
Consent for data collection	Yes
Additional remarks on the interview	

## Meet the leader

Name:	Sara Sousa Rebelo
Age:	42 y.o.
Gender:	Female
Current role and position:	Chief Operating Officer & Head of People
Years of Work Experience:	20
Years in Leadership Roles:	10
Organization:	Portocargo
Sector of Activity:	Transportation and Logistics
Country / City:	Portugal, Maia
Organisation Size:	<input type="checkbox"/> Micro x Small <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Large



## Main Interview Content

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Interview Section	Summary of Answers	Selected Quotes
<p>The Path to Leadership Key moments, challenges, values</p>	<p>The interviewee has worked in the logistics sector for over a decade, spanning various areas that have provided her with a comprehensive view of the business and shaped her approach to leadership. Since 2015 in leadership positions and currently COO &amp; Head of People at Portocargo, she advocates a close, empathetic, and authentic leadership style, based on active listening, clarity of purpose and valuing people. The most memorable moments of her journey were not isolated episodes, but the diversity of experiences that taught her the importance of leading with human connection. She is proud to see the evolution and involvement of the team, and has invested in a long-term organisational culture, focused on well-being, continuous training and humane and respectful management, with practices that range from onboarding to offboarding, also integrating symbolic actions, support for mental health, sports and happiness strategies in line with the SDGs.</p>	<p><i>"I've been fortunate enough to have had experience in a variety of areas... always in the logistics sector."</i></p> <p><i>"This path has given me a holistic and transversal perspective on the company's activity and operation."</i></p> <p><i>"Having worked in different areas within the organisation has given me a deep awareness of the challenges facing teams."</i></p> <p><i>"I believe in close and authentic leadership, because leading is ultimately about creating real connections with people."</i></p> <p><i>"What I'm most proud of is seeing that we manage to create, day after day, an environment where people feel good, involved and valued."</i></p> <p><i>"We have created a space where you can learn from your mistakes, take responsible risks and contribute with authenticity."</i></p>
<p>Your Approach to Leading Inclusion, decision-making, vision</p>	<p>The interviewee adopts inclusive and collaborative leadership, focused on people's well-being and an organizational culture of dialogue, purpose and active involvement. She fosters an environment where everyone feels heard and valued, with</p>	<p><b>Inclusion, listening and involvement of employees:</b></p>





	<p>practices such as coaching, mentoring, continuous listening, and direct employee involvement in process improvements. One of the most significant transformations he led was cultural, resulting in a more human environment and a loyal and motivated team. Sustainability guides decisions in three dimensions—environmental, social, and human—and is integrated into the company's daily operations. Beyond operational tasks, it seeks to generate meaning, belonging and positive impact, promoting a culture with a soul, in which each person recognises themselves as part of a greater mission. This vision extends to the community and the surrounding ecosystem, through educational partnerships, volunteering and support for local causes, reinforcing the organisation's social commitment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>“We encourage the sharing of ideas and suggestions for improvement... making everyone feel truly involved.”</i></li><li>• <i>“Teams are always listened to when we make changes, ensuring their active participation.”</i></li><li>• <i>“We have various programs in place, namely coaching and mentoring, ensuring that the personal and professional needs of all people are monitored.”</i></li></ul> <p><b>Cultural transformation and a positive organisational climate:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>“The most significant change I have led is undoubtedly of a cultural nature, with clear impacts on the organisational climate.”</i></li><li>• <i>“We regularly monitor the happiness and engagement of our employees... adjusting processes and Human Resources policies.”</i></li><li>• <i>“Working on talent, purpose, culture and personal and professional growth in an integrated way is the basis on which we have built a solid, committed and differentiating team.”</i></li></ul> <p><b>Sustainability as a guiding principle:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>“Sustainability is a guiding principle in our decision-making, relationships and management.”</i></li></ul>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“We see sustainability as a responsibility – to the present and to future generations.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“We invest in... reducing the use of paper, supporting local causes, volunteering... and guaranteeing balanced working rhythms.”</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Purpose and organizational culture with soul:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“We want to bring a deep sense of purpose and belonging to our team.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“We aim to create a culture with soul, where everyone feels truly valued, listened to and recognised.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“When people find meaning in their work... this happiness translates into excellence, creativity and solid results.”</i></li> </ul>
<p>Driving Change Strategies for sustainable and positive outcomes</p>	<p>The interviewee values conscious and humane leadership, based on active listening and emotional intelligence to deal with complex situations. She fosters collaboration through an open culture, where goals are shared, mistakes are seen as learning and teams feel confident to contribute. The impact of its leadership in areas such as inclusion and sustainability is assessed both by objective metrics (such as engagement, talent retention and external studies) and by subtle indicators such as the emotional environment of the teams. On a human level, it promotes employee well-being with recognition policies, ongoing training and career-long support. Environmentally, it invests in improving logistics processes, digitalization, energy efficiency and environmental preservation initiatives integrated into the team's dynamics.</p>	<p><b>Impact on the community and ecosystem:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“We believe that an organization can only prosper sustainably if it generates a positive impact on the ecosystem.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“We invest in solid partnerships with educational institutions... and promote volunteering and support for local social and sporting projects.”</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Collaboration and shared responsibility:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“We foster an open culture, where dialog is permanent and objectives are clear and shared by everyone.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“We see challenges as opportunities for collective growth, which generates an</i></li> </ul>





		<p><i>environment of trust, a sense of belonging and mutual commitment.”</i></p> <p><b>Impact assessment on inclusion and sustainability:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>“We measure impact through indicators such as talent loyalty, the level of engagement, the results of internal questionnaires.”</i></li><li>• <i>“I believe that effective leadership can be felt, and is not just about numbers.”</i></li><li>• <i>“The results have successively placed us among the best companies to work for in the country.”</i></li></ul> <p><b>Taking care of people:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>“Well-being programs, ongoing training, recognition policies, teambuilding actions and a work environment designed to be welcoming and healthy.”</i></li><li>• <i>“We offer additional vacation days, gifts for special occasions and close support throughout their career.”</i></li></ul> <p><b>Taking care of environment:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>“We have promoted improvements in logistics processes with a view to energy efficiency and reducing emissions.”</i></li><li>• <i>“We have incorporated natural plants into the workspaces as part of a more conscious and sustainable approach.”</i></li><li>• <i>“We promote activities linked to environmental preservation.”</i></li></ul>
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<p>Bias &amp; Belonging Tools, practices, awareness</p>	<p>The interviewee demonstrates a consistent commitment to inclusion and reducing bias, promoting equal opportunities regardless of gender, age, origin or career path. Although the organization does not have formal structured programs, inclusion is lived out on a daily basis, through practices of genuine listening, mutual respect, meritocracy and valuing diversity. It believes that giving space to different voices enriches decision-making, fosters more cohesive teams and stimulates more creative solutions. Conscious leadership, based on creating safe environments for authentic expression, is seen as essential for organizational success and for employees' sense of belonging.</p>	<p><b>Equal opportunities and diversity:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“We actively promote equal opportunities for all employees, regardless of gender, age, origin or career path.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“We have a diverse team, made up of people of different nationalities, backgrounds and experiences.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“We maintain a balanced distribution between women and men and cultivate a culture of respect, collaboration and merit on a daily basis.”</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Inclusion in everyday practice:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Even without structured formal programs, it is in the way we relate, make decisions and share responsibilities that we guarantee a genuinely inclusive environment.”</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Listening to and valuing different perspectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“I’ve learned that genuine listening is a powerful and transformative act.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“Creating an environment where everyone feels safe to share ideas, doubts or suggestions is a daily exercise in conscious leadership.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“Giving space to different voices allows us to find more creative solutions, make more</i></li> </ul>
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		<p><i>informed decisions and build more cohesive teams."</i></p>
<p>Sharing What Works Inspiration, examples, transferable tools</p>	<p>The interviewee shares a people-centred approach to leadership, with concrete practices that can serve as inspiration and a replicable model for other organisations. The focus on active listening, continuous feedback, a culture of merit and emotional well-being creates an environment of trust and sustainable growth. Initiatives such as humanized onboarding and offboarding, coaching and mentoring programs, benefits that go beyond financial (such as mental health support, sports activities and symbolic recognition), as well as a strategic happiness plan aligned with the SDGs, are transferable examples of management with impact. Leadership is exercised through small, consistent and intentional daily actions that value people, foster commitment and build a fairer and more regenerative ecosystem, both inside and outside the company.</p>	<p><i>"We have implemented practices such as regular feedback, active listening, continuous training and transparent internal communication."</i></p> <p><i>"We have improved the onboarding processes... and we also place great value on the moments of departure."</i></p> <p><i>"Our space has been renovated to be more welcoming and ergonomic, with natural plants, collaborative areas and conditions that promote well-being."</i></p> <p><i>"We have a strategic plan for happiness, aligned with Portocargo's culture and objectives, where we identify the alignment with each of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)."</i></p> <p><i>"We have improved the onboarding processes, making them more complete and welcoming, and we also place great value on the moments of departure."</i></p> <p><i>"We offer additional vacation days, celebrate special dates, and accompany personal and professional milestones with small symbolic gestures."</i></p> <p><i>"Working on talent, purpose, culture and personal and professional growth in an integrated way is the</i></p>





		<i>basis on which we have built a solid, committed and differentiating team.”</i>
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