

## **The retail store managers' role: Evidence from Greece**

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### ***Abstract***

Despite the fact that the retail manager's role is determinant for a store's performance, and there is abundant wisdom about how to be an outstanding manager or what are the characteristics of a successful retail manager, there is no detailed description about the store managers' role or their actual work. Furthermore, the continuous developments in the retail sector have established different roles and created higher levels of responsibility for store managers. The aim of the present paper is to empirically investigate the role of retail store managers in Greece and identify any potential differences in terms of personal characteristics, tasks and various job-related factors. For the purposes of this research a survey was conducted focusing on the sectors of apparel/footwear and food, in an attempt to explore any potential differences within the two divisions. The results revealed the profile of the Greek store managers (male, over the age of 40, with a secondary level of education and more than five years of work experience) and their multi-factor role. The three major roles that they perform were labeled as: sales oriented, supervisor, and customer experience oriented. The research also indicated that the two most popular sub-sectors in the Greek retail industry employ different profile managers. The issues of work experience, job satisfaction and security were also analysed.

**Keywords:** store managers, retail, role, Greece, job satisfaction

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Marketing scientists and practitioners have devoted a considerable attention on the subject of salespersons and sales managers practices (e.g. Boles et al., 2000; Boles et al., 2001; Deeter-Schmelz et al., 2002; Jaramillo et al., 2013; Pornpitakpan & Han, 2013; Shoemaker, 1999 etc) whereas the same does not apply for store managers. A review of the relevant literature revealed that although the retail managers' role is determinant for a store's performance, the academic inquiry into the analysis of their practices is extremely limited (Arnold et al, 2009). Numerous studies focus on the appealing of retailing as a career choice for business graduates (e.g. Broadbridge, 2007; Commins & Preston, 1997; Houlton & Thomas, 1990; Preston & Smith, 1996 ; Schmidt & Corbett, 1994 ; Swinyard 1981; Swinyard et al., 1991 etc). Researchers concluded that despite the technological advances in the industry, retailing did not appear to be an attractive option for the future managers (Rhoads et al., 2002) and was negatively associated with words like: "routine, boring, mundane, having long unsociable hours, with poor pay and poor advancement opportunities" (Broadbridge, 2003). Over the years, the retail industry has faced a difficulty in attracting "good quality" store managers (Commins and Preston, 1997).

So, despite the fact that there is abundant wisdom about how to be a successful manager or what are the characteristics of a successful retail manager there is no detailed description about the store managers' role or their actual work. Nevertheless, the continuous developments in the sector, such as multiple distribution channels, and customer service issues have established different roles and higher levels of responsibility for store managers (Levy & Weitz, 2012). Davies et al., 2006 described the development of retail stores from the selling of products and services to a "solution center" that also provides value-added services. In addition, today's economic environment enhances the necessity for organizations to hire retail managers who have the ability to satisfy their clients, in an increasingly competitive environment (Marshall and Michaels, 2001), and at the same time perform their work under fewer resources (Harris et al., 2006).

The present study is motivated by the need to investigate the role of retail store managers in Greece and identify any potential differences in terms of: personal characteristics, tasks, and various job-related factors. It focuses on the sectors of apparel/footwear and food and attempts to explore any potential differences within the two divisions. Furthermore, the research intends to provide some insight into the subject by replicating and extending a number of studies in various fields of the marketing literature such as: the product managers' role (Lysonski, 1985; Panigyrakis & Glynn, 1992), sales force (Jones et al., 2005; Ramaswami et al., 1993; Vukelic, 2005), the public relations manager's role (Panigyrakis, 2002), gender related differences in job attitudes (Lefkowitz, 1994; Panigyrakis & Poulis, 2009 ; Panigyrakis & Veloutsou, 1998) and therefore adopt the researchers' suggestions, who urged that the propensity towards generalization deriving from their findings should be tested by future studies.

The structure of the paper is as follows: in the subsequent section, the theoretical framework on the role of retail managers and the research questions are presented, followed by a short description of the Greek retail sector, the research methodology, the results, and the discussion and main implications. The study is concluded with the limitations and suggestions for future research.

## **2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 The role and profile of the retail store managers**

In a business environment the term "role" has a double meaning: it can be regarded both as the personnel's (managers and employees) expectations (of each other), and as the functions or positions they carry out in the company (Hartenian, 1994). In this paper the term role is based on the interpretation of Curcuru and Healey (1972) who stated that the concept of role refers to the "collection of activities that a person undertakes because he presumes that such activities are required in his position".

There is a great deal of controversy surrounding the implementation of the retail store managers' activities, which has been mainly concerned with defining the areas of responsibility and the authority that managers have to carry out their work (Deeter-Schmelz et al, 2008). Levy and Weitz (2012) divided the store manager's responsibilities into four general categories: managing employees, controlling costs, managing and displaying merchandise, and providing customer service. A store manager may also provide leadership in planning and goal setting, and is considered accountable for the total operation of the store (Pintel & Diamond, 1983). Although retail store managers reported having line responsibility in different decision areas, they were not the sole decision makers. More specifically, retail store managers appear to be coordinators rather than decision-makers (Ingram et al., 2006) and their role is generally characterized as a "boundary role" between the retailer and his customers as well as between the store and the different departments of the organization (Lusch & Serpkenci, 1990; Singh, 1996).

A store manager's tasks differ according to the type of retailer and the size of the firm (Levy & Weitz 2012). Notwithstanding, a store manager's job description may not always be precisely defined, and therefore allowing him to perform many tasks simultaneously. In these cases there is always the risk that the manager may neglect a role that he considers to be unnecessary, uninteresting or unpleasant (Curcuru & Healey, 1972).

Regarding the characteristics of a successful retail manager, Houlton and Thomas (1990) noted that he should be “socially adept, excellent communicator, energetic and determined”. Jain (2008) also commended that an effective store manager should be able to distinguish the aspects of the work that are important to his employees so that they will remain motivated and satisfied. Furthermore, the professional development and position of women in the retail sector have been investigated (e.g. Benson et al., 1980; Gable et al., 1994; Owen & Todor, 1993; Siguawa & Honeycutt, 1995). Evidence show that women although dominate the sector as employees are underrepresented in managerial positions (Maxwell & Ogden, 2006). Finally, other studies have been focusing on the issue of work experience in the retail sector and its relationship with work performance and job satisfaction (e.g. Darden and Howell, 1987; Kim et al., 2009; Quinones et al., 1995 etc.). Hence, this research is guided by the following three questions:

- Q1: What are the demographic characteristics (profile) of a store manager in Greece?
- Q2: Are there any differences on the profiles of the two most popular sub-sectors?
- Q3: What are the role tasks and responsibilities of a retail store manager?

## **2.2 Job related factors**

Lusch and Serpkeni (1990) stated that regardless of the “ample conventional wisdom about what makes a store manager successful” there is little evidence on the direct or indirect impact of job tension, performance or job satisfaction on the managers’ overall performance and the stores’ outcome.

Babin and Boles (1996) referred to the boundary role of store managers as a stressful factor. The opposite demands of each side (general managers and customers) also result to increased levels of role ambiguity and role conflict. In an organizational environment role ambiguity is developed when an employee receives insufficient information regarding his work tasks, and role conflict occurs when there is discrepancy between the expectations and demands of various workgroups (Harris et al., 2006). Since retail employees, stand between the sometimes diversified role expectations of inside and outside the organization, they often experience increased levels of role ambiguity (Johlke & Iyer, 2013). It appears that the absence of role clarity may also cause increased job tension (Donnelly & Ivancevich, 1975) and role stress (Knight et al., 2007). It seems that the more easily the managers adapt to the various tasks the more conflict they experience (Dubinsky & Hartley, 1986). Furthermore, if retail employees do not fully comprehend their “authority, job responsibilities, or manner in which their job will be evaluated, their motivation to engage in customer-oriented behaviour would be diminished” (Knight et al., 2005). All these influence the working environment and ultimately the job satisfaction of employees (Parker et al., 2003).

As an attitude, job satisfaction has been one of the most commonly studied variables in organizational behaviour (e.g. Davis & Nestrom, 1985; Hoppock, 1935; Mosadegh & Yarmohammadian, 2006; Mullins, 2005; Wright, 2006 etc) and describes the way people feel about their job and its different aspects (Spector, 1997). According to Statt (2004) the term job satisfaction refers to the measure of the employees’ contentment with the rewards they receive from their work, particularly in “terms of intrinsic motivation”. In order for job satisfaction to occur the management relationship between contact employees and employers should be characterized as successful (Yoon et al., 2001). More specifically, contact employees contribute to service quality by “delivering on the promises of the firm, creating a favorable image, promoting the firm’s products and services and, providing better service than the competition”. Therefore, their level of satisfaction is crucial to the firm (Bettencourt and Brown, 1997). Researchers have also studied the subject of job satisfaction on a retail setting (Boichuk and Menguc, 2013; Brashear et al., 2003; Brown and Peterson, 1994; Cho et al., 2013; Good et al., 1999; Kantabutra, 2011; Lucas et al., 1990; Rogers et al., 1994; Rutherford et al., 2009 etc). Giannikis and Mihail (2011) compared the satisfaction level of full-time employees to part-time employees and concluded that part-time employees showed lower satisfaction concerning their pay and job security. Christen et al. (2006) on the other hand pointed the positive relationship of autonomy to the job satisfaction of retail grocery store managers.

On the matter of supervision Arnold et al. (2009) investigated the affects that strict supervision and clear objective setting (from a retail chain’s higher levels of management) have on the store managers’ behaviour. They concluded that although the store managers’ sales efforts are negatively influenced by a rigorous managerial behaviour they should be inspired with unambiguous goals and high expectations. The issue of motivation (e.g. Bent & Freathy, 1997; Parsons & Broadbridge, 2006) in the retail sector has also been investigated. Regarding all of the above the following questions are stated:

- Q4: How satisfied from their work are the store managers in Greece?
- Q5: How insecure do they feel about their job?

### 3. THE RETAIL SECTOR IN GREECE

The retail sector is the dominant division of economic activity in Greece, based on the number of both enterprises and employees. According to the 2010 report of the Hellenic Statistical Authority (which is the country's official statistical source for all economic and social activities) 65% (185,976) out of a total of 286,101 companies operating in Greece belonged to the retail sector. Judging by the number of employees, most enterprises are characterized as small and medium sized. As it is shown in Table 1 the majority (49.08%) of the retail companies consisted of 2 to 9 employees, while another significant proportion of retailers (48.95%) operated with only one employee. Furthermore, due to the country's peculiar geography (mainland and numerous islands) the retail stores in Greece are fairly dispersed. The geographical distribution of the country's retail companies is depicted in Table 2. Most of them (30.83%) are based in Attica (mainly in the cities of Athens and Piraeus) and in the area of Central Macedonia (17.67%).

**Table 1: The classification of retail enterprises by employment size (2010)**

| Number of employees | Number of enterprises <sup>1</sup> | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1                   | 91,039                             | 48.95          |
| 2-9                 | 91,273                             | 49.08          |
| 10-19               | 2,557                              | 1.37           |
| 20-49               | 840                                | 0.45           |
| 50-249              | 219                                | 0.12           |
| 250 +               | 48                                 | 0.03           |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>185,976</b>                     | <b>100</b>     |

Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2010

<sup>1</sup>Except for the trade of motor vehicles and motorcycles

**Table 2: The classification of retail enterprises by region (2010)**

| Geographical Area            | Number of enterprises <sup>1</sup> | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------|
| Attica                       | 57,341                             | 30.83          |
| Central Macedonia            | 32,858                             | 17.67          |
| Thessalia                    | 13,396                             | 7.20           |
| Crete                        | 11,810                             | 6.35           |
| Western Greece               | 11,083                             | 5.96           |
| Eastern Macedonia and Thrace | 10,790                             | 5.80           |
| Peloponnissos                | 10,190                             | 5.48           |
| Central Greece               | 9,641                              | 5.18           |
| South Aegean Islands         | 8,656                              | 4.65           |
| Ipiros                       | 5,470                              | 2.94           |
| Ionian Islands               | 5,438                              | 2.92           |
| Western Macedonia            | 5,412                              | 2.91           |
| North Aegean Islands         | 3,891                              | 2.09           |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>185,976</b>                     | <b>100</b>     |

Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2010

<sup>1</sup>Except for the trade of motor vehicles and motorcycles

Regarding the market sizes of the industry's sub-sectors (Table 3), it appears that the core activity was the grocery trade (51.1%). On the non-grocery sub-sectors, apparel and footwear represented 10.3% of the industry, electronics and appliances 4.0% and the furniture/homewares stores 6.8% of the market (Euromonitor, 2010). The total turnover of the Greek grocery retailing was estimated at about 35 billion euro which was also the market size of other European countries such as Belgium, Switzerland and the Netherlands (IGD, 2010).

**Table 3: The classification of retail enterprises by market size (2010)**

| Retail sub-sectors                             | Percentage (%) |
|--|----------------|
| <b>Grocery retailers</b>                       | 51.1           |
| <b>Non-grocery retailers</b>                   |                |
| Apparel & footwear specialist retailers        | 10.3           |
| Electronics & appliance specialist retailers   | 4.0            |
| Health & beauty specialist retailers           | 9.9            |
| Home & garden specialist retailers             | 13.5           |
| <i>Furniture &amp; homewares stores (6.8%)</i> |                |
| Leisure & personal goods specialist retailers  | 7.0            |
| <i>Media products stores (1.6%)</i>            |                |
| <i>Stationers/office supply stores (0.1%)</i>  |                |
| Mixed retailers                                | 2.0            |
| Other non-grocery retailers                    | 2.2            |
| <b>Total</b>                                   | <b>100.0%</b>  |

Source: Euromonitor, 2010

The following table (Table 4) presents information based on the key variables of the Greek retail sector for the period 2002-2010. Generally, the number of companies operating in the sector showed an almost consistent rise until 2007, and so did the average number of employees until 2008. There should be pointed that from the 56,393,465 euro that was the total turnover of the Greek retail enterprises for 2007, 99.28% came from the purchase, resale and intermediary activities, 0.69% originated from service activities and 0.03% resulted from the industry's agricultural, forestry, fishing and industrial activities. Throughout the same period the companies' investments also showed continuous growth (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2010). In addition, 35.1% of the turnover originated from retail chains (Stochasis, 2011). In the years that followed the global financial crisis, which began in 2007, had a serious impact on the country's retail industry. By the end of 2010 the number of enterprises had dropped at about 2.74% and the average number of persons employed decreased by 7.8%.

Since 2009 the effects of the financial crisis became evident in the companies' turnover and investments as well (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2010).

**Table 4: The key variables of the Greek retail sector (2002-2010)**

|  | 2002       | 2003       | 2004       | 2005       | 2006       | 2007       | 2008       | 2009       | 2010       |
|--|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| <b>Number of companies</b>                             | 181,661    | 187,181    | 196,301    | 195,327    | 196,475    | 194,164    | 191,218    | 187,870    | 185,976    |
| <b>Average annual employment</b>                       | 492,478    | 482,709    | 478,987    | 505,692    | 518,677    | 535,058    | 538,813    | 500,470    | 496,322    |
| <b>Personnel costs (total)<sup>1</sup></b>             | 2,919,693  | 3,021,022  | 3,139,779  | 3,783,932  | 4,069,848  | 4,659,558  | 4,735,236  | 4,805,485  | 4,474,386  |
| <b>Wages and salaries<sup>1</sup></b>                  | 2,235,807  | 2,285,870  | 2,387,549  | 3,001,452  | 3,233,309  | 3,680,690  | 3,709,584  | 3,779,149  | 3,524,908  |
| <b>Turnover<sup>1,2</sup></b>                          | 41,431,993 | 41,707,974 | 42,111,620 | 49,012,774 | 52,110,312 | 56,393,465 | 63,720,596 | 59,011,902 | 57,080,078 |
| <b>Gross margin on goods for resale<sup>1</sup></b>    | 10,201,528 | 14,700,851 | 12,868,400 | 12,470,568 | 12,658,558 | 15,201,080 | 14,780,162 | 13,866,101 | 13,004,423 |
| <b>Gross investments in tangible goods<sup>1</sup></b> | 985,129    | 1,100,180  | 943,484    | 1,670,850  | 1,859,663  | 1,596,953  | 2,321,780  | 896,474    | 857,768    |

Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2011

<sup>1</sup> In thousands of euro

<sup>2</sup> Without the value added tax

Greece's economic instability changed consumer preferences and caused them to reevaluate their priorities. The common tendency was to avoid all unnecessary expenses and as a result consumers' demand decreased. Non-grocery retailers experienced the most considerable decline, while grocery retailers (mostly food and staples) registered a small increase in their revenue after gaining more share on the consumers' budget (Euromonitor, 2010). This increase derived mainly from the large grocery retailers (IELKA, 2011). According to Eurostat (2009) the products whose sales volume was mostly affected by the downturn were: computers and peripheral units, software, and telecommunications equipment. On the other hand, the change in the retail sales

of textiles, clothing, footwear, and leather, for the same year was marked as positive. The highest volume and at the same time the turning point for the retail sales was recorded in March 2008. Since then, both the indicators of consumer and retail confidence have been dropping.

As demand continued dropping, especially during 2010, the retail industry became even more competitive. The continuous decline influenced grocery retailers as well, and ended their short immunity. By the end of 2010 competition in the retail market had been characterised as “asphyxiating”. This situation led many enterprises to relocate, or cut down on operating costs and personnel and some (mostly independent owners but also some multinational organizations) were even forced to withdraw from the market. The non- grocery retailers that were mostly affected by the downturn were: pet shops, clothing and footwear, furniture, electrical and household equipment, books and stationary (Euromonitor, 2010). These results are also depicted in the data of the following table (Table 5) where the indexes of turnover and volume are presented (Hellenic statistical Authority, 2011).

**Table 5: Turnover and volume indexes of the Greek retail trade (2008-2010)**

|   | 2008                  |                     | 2009                  |                     | 2010                  |                     |
|---|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
|   | <i>Turnover Index</i> | <i>Volume Index</i> | <i>Turnover Index</i> | <i>Volume Index</i> | <i>Turnover Index</i> | <i>Volume Index</i> |
| <b>Overall Index</b>                                  | 142.9                 | 129.0               | 146.8                 | 128.8               | 127.0                 | 103.7               |
| <b>Overall Index</b><br>(except for automotive fuel)  | 144.5                 | 128.4               | 145.4                 | 127.8               | 120.3                 | 102.1               |
| <b>Main sectors</b>                                   |                       |                     |                       |                     |                       |                     |
| Food sector   | 147.5                 | 127.9               | 147.6                 | 127.6               | 130.7                 | 106.4               |
| Automotive fuel sector                                | 110.7                 | 118.3               | 130.0                 | 111.0               | 146.7                 | 87.5                |
| Non-food sector                                       | 142.6                 | 130.1               | 144.6                 | 129.2               | 112.4                 | 99.4                |
| <b>Specialized store categories</b>                   |                       |                     |                       |                     |                       |                     |
| Supermarkets  | 150.7                 | 132.4               | 148.3                 | 129.8               | 132.5                 | 110.1               |
| Department stores                                     | 140.8                 | 131.2               | 128.2                 | 118.2               | 107.2                 | 96.9                |
| Automotive fuel                                       | 110.7                 | 118.3               | 130.0                 | 111.0               | 146.7                 | 87.5                |
| Food-beverages-tobacco                                | 132.7                 | 115.0               | 145.2                 | 125.5               | 123.3                 | 100.3               |
| Pharmaceutical products & cosmetics                   | 130.1                 | 124.1               | 142.5                 | 133.6               | 124.9                 | 120.8               |
| Clothing & footwear                                   | 145.7                 | 127.7               | 148.7                 | 127.0               | 115.9                 | 96.8                |
| Furniture, electrical equipment & household equipment | 138.3                 | 134.6               | 144.6                 | 139.5               | 95.0                  | 91.4                |
| Books, stationery, other goods                        | 168.7                 | 157.0               | 158.5                 | 144.0               | 135.9                 | 120.0               |
| Retail sale not in stores                             | 128.2                 | -                   | 141.1                 | -                   | 106.9                 | -                   |

(Base year: 2005=100.0)

Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2011

## 4. METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Sample and Data Collection

In order to investigate the objectives of the present study a survey was conducted during the second half of 2010, using a purposive nonprobability sample (judgment sampling). The sampling frame was difficult to obtain since there was no official record for the total number of store managers or the retail stores operating in Greece. The mailing list that was finally used was the membership directory of the Hellenic Retail Business Association. The data collection approach was the self-administrated survey. More specifically, the data were collected using a combination of the online (email) and the traditional mail survey, which given the geographical dispersion of retail stores in Greece (in the mainland and insular regions) provided the researchers the ability to contact participants who were difficult to access.

The design of the questionnaire was conducted in two phases. Initially the roles, tasks and responsibilities of the store managers were identified based on the literature review and personal interviews with Greek retail managers. Several retailers provided duty statements and job descriptions which gave additional insight into the manager's current responsibilities. After the questionnaire was developed, it was pre-tested (second stage) to a small sample of retail managers. The respondents were asked to evaluate the questions' clarity, the time

consumed and indicate any possible omissions (Bell, 2005). In addition to the questionnaire the managers also received a cover letter, which is considered as a supplemental part of the “mail survey package” (Cooper and Schindler, 2003), that invited them to participate in the research. In the cover letter, it was also stated that the present research was performed for academic purposes and that the manager’s personal information would be protected.

The questionnaire was mailed to 1,519 practitioners working in six retail sectors: grocery, apparel/footwear, furniture, appliances/electronics, media products, and stationary/books. After two follow ups, 285 questionnaires were collected from which only the 277 were valid, thus reducing the response rate to 18.23%. The demographic profile of the participants is depicted in Table 6.

**Table 6: The demographic profile of the store managers in Greece**

| Category                                       | Responses  | Percentage (%) |
|--|------------|----------------|
| <i>Age</i>                                     |            |                |
| 18-31  | 11         | 3.97           |
| 31-40  | 86         | 31.05          |
| 41-50  | 150        | 54.15          |
| 50+  | 30         | 10.83          |
| <i>Gender</i>                                  |            |                |
| Male   | 258        | 93.14          |
| Female   | 19         | 6.86           |
| <i>Education</i>                               |            |                |
| Secondary education                            | 185        | 66.79          |
| Post-secondary education (vocational training) | 11         | 3.97           |
| Tertiary education                             | 81         | 29.24          |
| <i>Years with the company</i>                  |            |                |
| Less than 5                                    | 47         | 16.97          |
| 5 – 8  | 72         | 25.99          |
| 9 – 14   | 101        | 36.46          |
| More than 14                                   | 57         | 20.58          |
| <b>Total</b>                                   | <b>277</b> | <b>100</b>     |

The majority of the Greek retail managers (54%) were between the age of 41 and 50 years old, male (93%) who had been working approximately 9 to 14 years with the company (36%). Only 4% were under the age of 30. Still an important percentage (31%) was 31-40 years old while almost 26% had 5-8 years tenure with the same company. Although retail employees tend to leave the industry for attaining better jobs (job-hoppers) particularly in the food sector (Brown,2005), the vast majority of the sample (83%) had been employed by the same retailer for more than 5 years.

There should also be noted that the majority of respondents (67%) were secondary education (lyceum) graduates which appeared to be the minimum qualification level for acquiring this position. From the tertiary education managers (29%), only 6% had a post-graduate degree (MA, MSc or MBA) and a very small percentage (2%) holds two university degrees. It is evident that in the retail industry specialized skills and increased education are not valued as important as other individual characteristics such as work experience and commercial awareness (Gush, 1996).

Subsequently the data were analysed in two stages. First, descriptive statistics were calculated and significance tests were carried out to determine the demographic variables that were different between retail managers. Furthermore, in-depth analysis was conducted focusing on the sectors that dominated the sample: grocery (food) and apparel/footwear.

## 4.2 Measurements

Based on the objectives of the research the variables were divided to: background variables, job related factors and store management activities. The selected variables were modified in order to reflect the unique characteristics of the retail store manager's role and to provide practitioners with useful implications.

### 4.2.1 Background variables

The background variables consisted of the store managers' demographics and individual characteristics (age, gender, education and years working with the same company) which were used to outline their profile as well as to discover any potential differences across sectors.

### 4.2.2 Job related factors

The next variable to be evaluated was the store managers' job satisfaction. Since there was no empirical research on the issue of job satisfaction in the retail sector, the items were modified from the study of Pruden and Reese (1972) and measured on a seven-point Likert scale. The store managers were asked to state their opinion on the subjects of quality management and supervision, compensation and benefits, the work position itself, the internal communications, and their relation with the sales people as well as the company's policies. As a measure of reliability the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was estimated. The results showed that the alpha coefficient was above 0.60 (0.78) which is considered as a satisfactory indicator of scale reliability and therefore, acceptable for social research (Nunnally, 1978).

### 4.2.3 Store management activities

Due to the lack of researches on the subject of store managers' responsibilities and activities (Ingram et al., 2006), 24 items were developed representing the tasks, responsibilities and expected behavioural aspects and were based mainly on personal, in depth interviews with retail managers. Respondents were asked to use a seven-point scale (anchored 1= "I strongly disagree" to 7= "I strongly agree") and indicate their agreement with each item.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Work experience and job security

Based on the results, although the first job position varied among respondents, almost one third of the sample commenced their working career at the retail assistant level. The average retail manager had at least four years experience in various levels before acquiring the management position.

On the issue of job security the majority of participants (78%) stated that their occupation offers a moderate (40.80%) or a good level of job security (37.18%). Still a significant percentage (22.02%) mentioned that they feel insecure about their work (Table 7). It seems that the negative effects of the financial crisis and the layoffs of employees have affected the psychology of retail store managers.

**Table 7: The store managers' job security**

| Job security | Responses  | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|------------|----------------|
| Good         | 103        | 37.18          |
| Average      | 113        | 40.80          |
| Bad          | 61         | 22.02          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>277</b> | <b>100</b>     |

### 5.2 Statistical analysis on the focus sectors

As it was aforementioned the grocery and apparel/footwear sectors were proved particularly important since they comprised the majority of the sample. This outcome was anticipated whereas they are the two dominant divisions in the Greek retail industry (Euromonitor, 2010). Subsequently a more detailed analysis was conducted. The reduced sample consisted of 112 store managers in the grocery sector and 107 managers in the apparel/footwear sector (n2=219). The descriptive statistics and significance tests between the two sectors revealed that even though the two divisions employed managers of similar age ( $\chi^2=2.3$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<0.08$ ) and gender distribution ( $\chi^2=7.92$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<0.07$ ), the store managers of the apparel/footwear sector were younger ( $\chi^2=1.82$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.22$ ). Nevertheless the food sector managers were more experienced ( $\chi^2=8.8$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<0.04$ ).

Regarding the issue of job satisfaction the respondents appeared to be content, with no extensive differences among the two targeted fields (Table 8). The most intense diversification appeared on the subjects of "top management support and supervision" where the grocery sector managers' seem to be more satisfied and that of "company policies" where the opposite situation occurred. These minor contrasts are indicative of the

similar conditions that the Greek store managers experience, regardless of the sector or the type of retailing they work. In detail the store managers share almost the same prospective concerning their activities and responsibilities (the “actual work”), the “internal communication and colleagues” and their relationship with their team that is the “salespeople”. In relation to the “internal communication and colleagues” the Mann Whitney U test was performed. The similarities in the sample’s responses were confirmed ( $z = -3.2356$ ,  $p=0.003$ ). Based on the results the store managers seem to be satisfied with their daily tasks but no so content with their compensation. The above results confirm the literature which refers to the moderate or low wages of the retail industry (Broadbridge, 2003). The store managers also expressed their satisfaction on the subject of the salespeople despite the high rate of staff turnover (Good et al, 1996) which creates a difficult working environment for the managers who are responsible for selecting, recruiting, motivating and evaluating them. According to Levy and Weitz (2012) the employee turnover in the retail industry is approximately 60% for the fulltime and 115% for the part-time employees.

**Table 8: Mean differences in job satisfaction**

| Categories of job satisfaction       | Grocery    | Apparel/footwear | $\chi^2$ | p     |
|--------------------------------------|------------|------------------|----------|-------|
| Top management support & supervision | 5.1        | 5.5              | 2.36     | 0.009 |
| Compensation & benefits              | 4.7        | 4.9              | 2.45     | 0.012 |
| Work                                 | 5.2        | 5.3              | 2.73     | 0.024 |
| Internal communications & colleagues | 4.9        | 5.1              | -0.31    | 0.831 |
| Company policies & procedures        | 5.3        | 4.8              | 3.81     | 0.011 |
| Salespeople                          | 5.2        | 5.1              | 1.91     | 0.161 |
| <i>n2</i>                            | <i>112</i> | <i>107</i>       |          |       |

In the cases where participants expressed their discontent, they were asked to explain the causes using open-end questions. The respondents supplied the following reasons:

Too much time is spent on daily activities and not enough on planning and searching for new market opportunities.

- a) There is not enough authority in the overall decision making process.
- b) Poor communication within the store.
- c) Difficulty in interpreting the actual role of the retail store manager.
- d) High employee turnover rate.
- f) There is a mismatch between the delegated authority and responsibility.

Moreover, in absence of a specific empirical measure, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted in order to derive a preliminary examination of the measure’s factorial structure. The exploratory factor analysis was performed with a varimax rotation to ascertain the number of underlying dimensions (roles) of the retail store managers on the two sets of data ( $n2=219$ ). The analysis was performed using the 24 store management activities that were included in the questionnaire. The number of responses was considered adequate for an exploratory factor analysis based on the rule of ten to one (responses to number of variables) ratio (Hair et al., 1998).

In the subsequent table (Table 9) a three-factor solution, deriving from the exploratory factor analysis is presented. The three factor solution is equivalent to the 72.4% of the total variance. In addition the Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were calculated in order to test each factor’s internal consistency and reliability. It should also be mentioned that only 17 out of the 24 initial items were finally incorporated, since these items corresponded the most and their loading values exceeded at least the cutting point of 0.40.

**Table 9: Factors for the importance scores of the tasks (or responsibility areas)\***

| Factors   | Mean | Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient |
|---|------|------------------------------|
| <i>Factor 1 'Sales oriented' (explaining 29,2 % of total variance)</i>                |      |                              |
| Accept responsibility and work with a high level of accountability                    | 6.16 | 0.69                         |
| Planning is essential   | 5.18 |                              |
| Keeping and organising store records-effective stock handling                         | 5.47 |                              |
| Policies and procedures are important to support the managers' role                   | 5.69 |                              |
| Merchandising is retailers' silent salespeople.                                       | 6.23 |                              |
| Taking risks is within contemporary management culture                                | 5.59 |                              |
| <i>Factor 2 'Supervisor' (explaining 23,45 % of total variance)</i>                   |      |                              |
| Managers have to provide encouragement through their behaviour                        | 5.35 | 0.72                         |
| Arranging staff schedules, support team 'health'                                      | 4.87 |                              |
| Assistance in resolving issues with staff members                                     | 5.83 |                              |
| Be a team player is a crucial management task   | 4.65 |                              |
| <i>Factor 3 'Customer experience oriented' (explaining 19,75 % of total variance)</i> |      |                              |
| Provision of excellent customer service   | 5.23 | 0.68                         |
| Give the best efforts for providing a positive experience to the customer             | 4.58 |                              |
| Listening constructive to customer  | 5,48 |                              |
| The manager represents the whole firm   | 4,9  |                              |
| Change is sometimes vital within a retail firm  | 5,18 |                              |
| Aiming to build and maintain long term relationships with the customer                | 4,86 |                              |
| Learning from the customer  | 4.9  |                              |

*All loadings greater than 0.40 are shown*

The three factors are labelled as follows: "sales oriented", "supervisor" and "customer experience oriented" which represent three significant categories of the store manager's activities. These three roles consist of different but complimentary tasks, all crucial for the effective management of the retail store and confirm the literature that the retail store is a value-adding solution center (Davies et al., 2006). The first part of the manager's role is the "sales oriented" which constitutes the basis of retailing and focuses on displaying the merchandise, suggesting new products and communicating with buyers. The "supervisor" role involves the employee management tasks. The store manager should train and motivate his team, set the good example, socialize and communicate with sales people and finally reward and compensate them. Last but not least, the "customer experience oriented" role concentrates on creating a unique "shopping experience" for customers. These services affect the customers directly and increase both the value of the merchandise and the store. Store managers have the best knowledge of the customer needs and receive daily feedback. At the same time they also express the firm's marketing strategy. It is evident that the ideal store manager should incorporate all three roles.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper provides information on the background of the Greek retail store managers and some insight has been gained into their beliefs on specific organizational factors, since no related research has been published. In today's highly competitive environment, where most small companies in the country are struggling to survive, the understanding of their role is even more important. The variables that were used to determine the respondents' background consisted of demographic characteristics, activities, work experience and certain behavioural factors. The results were used to create a profile for the retail store managers and also discover potential differences on the profile of the apparel/footwear and grocery store managers.

The results showed that store managers in Greece are mainly men over the age of 40 with a secondary level of education, having at least four years of experience in the field (Q1). The existence literature on the low presence of women in higher managerial levels was verified by the present study. The research also indicated that the two most popular sub-sectors in the Greek retail industry employ different profile managers (Q2). The two groups had some differences in demographic characteristics (age) and work experience. The majority of the

retail store managers obtained their current positions primarily on the basis of their experience rather than their mere education. The post-graduate degree received less value than might be expected for a career in management. These findings are consistent with the literature which supports that retailing is not a very appealing career choice for university graduates and that well educated managers do not prefer working on the front line of the retail sector.

Store managers reported their moderate satisfaction with the main managerial activities of their position, but at the same time expressed their dissatisfaction with their compensation. Another obstacle that prevents them from performing their duties more efficiently is the industry's high rate of employee turnover (Q4). There should also be noted that store managers nowadays are rather insecure about their work and that the signs of the financial crisis have begun to show on their psychology (Q5).

The exploratory factor analysis revealed that the retail store managers' perform a multi-factor role. More specifically, they are performing three major roles that were labelled as sales oriented, supervisor and customer experience oriented (Q3). A retail store manager should try to deliver the optimum quality service and provide customers with a memorable store experience while at the same time apply an effective supervision on his team and also meet with the retailer's goals in terms of sales and day-today operation. Despite the particularities of each sector, no differences came to light regarding their activities.

The findings of this paper indicate that retailers and company managers should take under consideration the triple role of the store managers and the complications that derive from its implementation. They can draw useful conclusions on ways to better implement their retail management programs and strategies and motivate their employees. This could involve more detailed job descriptions, defining specific performance evaluation criteria, and ensuring proper training in specific areas.

## 7. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper also has some limitations. The most important issue would be the one-sided focus on the retail store managers' perceptions regarding their role. It is possible that their superiors or higher level managers would have a different perception. Therefore, the existence of potential discrepancies between retail store managers' and their superiors' perceptions could be examined in a future study. Moreover, the relative influence of the retail store managers in the decision making process should be explored. Another limitation is the investigation of the specific retail sectors. All these issues could be analysed using additional sectors and international data.

The reasons for the differences and similarities that were reported within the retail store managers in the two sectors are not entirely clear and thus require further research. The background and training of the store managers themselves only partially explain these differences. It should be interesting to investigate if certain roles of retail store managers are more appropriate in some sectors rather than others. Furthermore, the reasons for the non-existence of women in these positions of the Greek retail sector should be investigated.

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