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Produções Fictícias,***Managing an Agency of Creatives***

Abstract: *Produções Fictícias (PF) is a Portuguese company known for providing highly creative scripts for several media channels. The case opens with a description of the origins of the company, how it evolved from a group of amateurs and friends into a more formal business structure, the obstacles they faced and the opportunities they took under the leadership of Nuno Artur Silva and with the shared vision of creating a company that specialized in the writing of humoristic content. In time this vision would give rise to a distinctive professional structure in the world of scriptwriter representation. The rest of the case details how creativity was managed and how PF recruits and motivates its producers. The company places extraordinary emphasis on encouraging creativity, and exceptional professionalism.*

Keywords: *organizational behavior, creativity and innovation management, leadership, culture, control, motivation, knowledge workers, cultural industries.*



“I always wished to write fiction and my global, artistic project was to build an ideas centre, a place where people could meet to write theatre plays, movie scripts and stories. I always believed that *Produções Fictícias* was a good name to express this.” explained Nuno Artur Silva, founder and CEO of *Produções Fictícias* (the English translation is “fictitious productions”, from hereon “PF”). PF has become a well-known brand in the Portuguese market, characterized by a high quality of creative production

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Ana Filipa Oliveira prepared this case with research assistance by Miguel ~Pina e Cunha solely as the basis for class discussion. This case is not intended to serve as endorsement, source of primary data or illustrations of effective or ineffective management.

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and a great sense of professionalism. However, what sustains the success of the company is its human resources and the way PF creatively manages them.

Knowledge-intensive firms have a number of distinctive organizational and market characteristics which challenge traditional ways of management. The success of such organizations is ensured by their ability to manage their people in such a way that knowledge is shared within the organization, and inextricably linked with the product or service they provide.

Employee skills were central to the creation of a competitive advantage and, indeed, to the survival of PF when market conditions were tough. However, it is not only the presence of human capital that is important, but also the way in which it is applied, this in particular makes this organization distinctive and a case study for other companies, knowledge-intensive or not.

Elsewhere we can see examples of traditional hierarchical structures where teams operate in functional pyramids, with few mechanisms to share explicit knowledge between employees, let alone tacit knowledge. At PF these mechanisms exist and have provided the company with much success over the last 10 years.

In 2008 the company possesses an established business structure with almost 30 employees, with the majority producers that express their creativity through original concepts and projects over various media, such as television, theatre, radio, web / new media, newspapers, books, cinema and so on. Competing with creativity is always risky since the outcome is hard to predict, but this company has so far done well and achieved positive results within a few years. PF has received several awards and owns a portfolio of successes that represent a revolution in the way humour is produced in Portugal¹. Brand awareness is so strong that, unlike the typical approach in this industry, PF brand promoted the scripts and not the individual authors themselves.

Origins

It all began in the 1980s when a group of friends: Nuno Artur Silva, Miguel Viterbo e José Pina, discovered how much fun it was to write humour for small sketches, used in TV shows at the time. Shortly afterwards, these friends created with others the cultural association *Indício* that turned out to be the source of PF, since it was at this time that

¹ Please go to www.producoesficticias.com for more information on the outcome of such creativity.

the talent for working together for professional development of humoristic projects was revealed.

During the implementation of *Indício*, Nuno Artur Silva organized *Nocturnos*, small meetings for poetry recitals that took place in *Estufa Fria* and counted with the participation of several people from various backgrounds. It was at one of those meetings that Nuno Artur Silva met José Pedro Gomes and Miguel Guilherme, two Portugal's well-known comics who, seduced by the creative ability of Nuno Artur Silva, asked him to write some sketches for a TV show by Joaquim Letria² to appear on the Portuguese RTP2 television channel.

The success of these sketches, measured by the large audiences achieved during the program, initiated a long sequence of shows that would characterize the start of PF. PF's main objective was the creation of a kind of humour that was until then quite rare on Portuguese television. The content joked with all kinds of TV shows such as TV contests, music, movie and talk shows.

In the early 1990s Nuno Artur met Herman José, a Portuguese TV entertainer and comic who gave PF a kind of insurance that no one from Portuguese television was able to give: it guaranteed a quantity and quality of work that the company desired. Working with Herman was a great achievement for the PF producers. When Herman received the scripts, he could easily perform them in the correct way, seeming to identify with the characters with a speed of someone who could almost read the scriptwriters' thoughts.

Upon agreement on a fundamental rule that would characterize the professional bond between Herman José and Nuno Artur, a simple rule: Nuno Artur could write whatever he wanted and Herman José could change whatever he wanted. Soon-after the results of such a partnership appeared in the television slots: "Parabéns", "Herman Zap", "Herman Jornal", and "Herman Enciclopédia" among others. This successful team continued until 2008 with a continuous production of scripts for TV talk shows presented by Herman and broadcast on prime-time on the main Portuguese TV channels. The foundations for the new company were launched.

² Portuguese TV entertainer.

The Challenge of Growth

Although PF was little more than a few meetings between a group of friends on *Rua das Janelas Verdes* in Lisbon (a street well-known for its nightlife due to its array of bars and discos), there was still a high sense of responsibility and professionalism when meeting deadlines and in the quality of the final product.

During that time Nuno Artur Silva assumed the management of the company and was responsible for contacting clients, leading meetings, allocating work to the writing teams, and so on. In Nuno Artur Silva's own words: "At a given time it was a big mess. I did it all: receive the money, deliver receipts, pay people, lead projects... I was going crazy! And we needed a bigger place to work!" The need for a more structured way of managing became apparent.

So in 1995 Nuno Artur Silva asked Carlos Fogaça to manage PF and help him create a business structure for the company, given that Nuno Artur would be the manager of everything related to the writing process. Nuno Artur's vision consisted of the creation of a company specializing in the writing of humoristic content. His concern was with the quality of their work. By specializing in humour they would be encouraging a certain quality. The more they specialized, the better the final output would be.

Within this new structure Nuno and Carlos became partners, the former as Management and Creative Director, with Carlos responsible for other matters such as financial, contractual and organizational issues. All the other writers were nominated associates, in other words, creative freelancers with a preferential treatment from the new company.

The organizational structure that Carlos proposed to Nuno implied the participation of all members, but was very dynamic not only in business terms, but also in social terms. Upon reflection Carlos created what he says is a "unique business structure in the world", that allows for the compensation in a business manner of the creative disorganization that PF's producers were accustomed to. This business structure is based on few rules and few hierarchical levels with no traditional/specialist departments and functions, where the large majority of producers are freelancers with no legal bond to the company, but who possess executive rights to vote and veto projects by participating on the Executive Committees. In other words, freelancers could vote for the projects they believed the company should develop, or veto projects

they believe were not in line with the company strategy (see organizational chart in exhibit 1). This is why the elaboration of this organizational model took time and was a very delicate process. Carlos says that he has never seen people so “globally disorganized”: with no space to work, no computers (without viruses) where they could write safely and no paper to send faxes!

The first meeting of the newly formed PF joined together partners and associates around the same table, and each one exposed their concerns. The starting point for consideration was “What do we want for our company?” And the global answer was “Creativity + Availability + Just Enough Organization + Pay check stability” “Just enough” was used so as not to scare producers who could only support moderate portions of organization. However, the last objective was the one that left all the producers more comfortable and relaxed: their salary was guaranteed even if clients missed payments.

From the beginning there was a clear concern from Nuno Artur Silva to secure full participation from every member in the company’s decisions and thus, increase organizational citizenship. The revolution in terms of structure enabled the company’s consolidation and its growing presence in the Portuguese market.

Golden Age

In 1997 Nuno Artur Silva elaborated a scheme, although not intentional, that has become one of the most distinctive marketing measures in all of PF’s history.

Every year the Portuguese television channel *S/C* and the Portuguese popular magazine *Caras* organizes “Globos de Ouro”, a ceremony similar to the Hollywood Oscars to distinguish personalities from different artistic areas.

In 1997 PF was nominated in 2 categories: “Herman Enciclopédia” for the best entertainment show and “Contra-Informação” for the best fiction show³ and Nuno Artur and Carlos Fogaça were invited to the ceremony. However, the other scriptwriters from both TV shows were not. After some unsuccessful attempts to obtain the desired tickets for the other scriptwriters, Nuno Artur came up with the idea of inviting Helen, a

³For examples of the shows please consult the following websites: <http://pftv.sapo.pt/16/22/> and <http://pftv.sapo.pt/showall/16/24/>.

beautiful tall blond model working at that time in “Não És Homem Não És Nada”⁴, to attend the “Globos de Ouro”. Her job was to represent PF and if the company was eventually awarded a prize, upon accepting the award she should read the following:



“Hello, my name is Helen and I’m here representing PF. As, in this ceremony, people come to see and to be seen, the guys from PF don’t feel physically up to, so they understand that the best contribution they could give is with my presence. It is true: I have nothing to do with “Herman Enciclopédia”, nevertheless several people here in the audience have nothing to do with the shows nominated. Hereafter PF suggests that other winners uglier than them should follow their example. Moreover regarding the future, we hope that my presence here may be an incentive for, in future years, your continued vote for shows written by PF. Thank you very much.”

That year the golden globe for best entertainment show went to “Herman Enciclopédia”.

2 Organizational Models to 1 Company

For the first time in the history of PF there was a stable structure where the “creatives” only needed to worry about their writing. Everything else, related with negotiations, payments and management procedures remained Carlos’s responsibility, who defined himself as “the manager trying not to interfere with creative issues, someone who assumed the bad guy role and who wasn’t born to be nice”.

However, at that time the differences between Carlos and the producers became impossible to disguise: “At some point I could no longer deal with them. There were producers receiving almost 5.000 € per month and still complaining about poor wages. In reality they were displeased about something and just weren’t able to express it”. In fact this “something” translated into the inability of PF’s producers to accept the idea

⁴ TV series written by PF.

that they were Carlos's employees and also, Carlos's unwillingness to not be treated as the boss.

According to Carlos Fogaça, "the 'fictitious marriage' was a happy match, where he assumed the role of father and Nuno Artur the role of mother. Nuno Artur was always around the producers and whenever there was some kind of lack of motivation he tried to talk with each one of them. When we work with creativity, we deal with emotions and feelings and it is natural that some tension has to be managed. Sometimes we need to manage them in a fond way, other times in an authoritarian way. Someone has to say "This is wrong, someone has to leave". Every time things got tough, Nuno would say "Oh! Oh! I'm going to tell your father."". However, none of the PF's producers saw themselves as Carlos's sons because they believed his desire was to be the man that hired and fired the producers. In a company where egos are often a bone of contention, conflicts are inevitable.

Carlos's decision to leave the company was based on different perspectives of the organizational model: Carlos defended that PF should follow a model of an advertising agency with a clear separation between management functions and non-management functions; Nuno Artur defended a solution of an agency of "creatives" supported by an organizational structure.

According to Nuno Artur "This is a company born from "creatives" and the fact that it has a more professional structure should not pervert the company's logic, which is that of creativity and of a certain chaos. First comes chaos and then comes order, and not the opposite. The company begins with the "creatives" and then there is a structure that allows both creativity and chaos to connect to the real world. PF's first big crisis happened with my partner who wanted to create a company with strict rules and believed there was no uniqueness in our producers, they could be easily replaced and then I said "No, no, this is a creative agency that gives a professional response to clients, but where creativity plays the principal role, its strength lies in creativity. We must give to that creativity a logic, but never sacrifice creativity in the name of structure."

Creativity is at the centre of PF so all logistics resulted from the need to support the production of creativity. The solution in terms of organizational structure was to build one with few hierarchical levels and with low levels of bureaucracy so that producers

would not need to have to formally report to a strict hierarchy. According to Nuno Artur Silva, PF is an “association of people without association skills”.

The main goal is to secure an informational flow and not a blocked hierarchical structure. The key word is “organicity”, non-hierarchy. There is a complete organic collaboration and not hierarchical, everyone informs everyone. There are pre-established codes where some people have access to some issues but others do not, even then, there are some restrictions to information access, but that is a natural consequence of task specialization, not an intended code of action.

As a result we can identify two different worlds within PF, the creative world which is the focus of the company and the back office which is responsible for supporting the creative world in issues such as treasury, legal, logistic, payroll and so on.

(Dis)Organizing Creative Work

There are three levels within PF’s creative world: partners, associates and temporary collaborators. The partners accumulate creative production together with administrative functions. There are 6 partners that belong to the creative world and two more who are fully devoted to the non-creative world. Altogether there are 22 associates that do not formally belong to the company, but have an agency contract which stipulates that all their writing activity is exclusively represented by PF. Finally there is a network of collaborators working at random and are quite often invited to join the company as associates depending on the regularity of high quality output.

Among partners and associates there are 28 creatives and three different generations: the 40s generation (where we can find most of the founding partners), the 30s generation and the new 20s generation. This is naturally one of the ingredients of the company’s success, because producers from different generations will be able to reach a more diversified public.

From a more functional perspective there are 2 Executive Directors led by Nuno Artur Silva, Teresa Schimdt and Gonçalo Félix. Teresa is in charge of managing the traditional businesses of the company such as representing the associates, customer relationships, and brand management for “Contra-Informação”, “Herman”, “Gato Fedorento”, “Nuno Markl” and “Inimigo Público”. Gonçalo, an MBA graduate from Universidade Nova de Lisboa, is responsible for New Business and the Commercial

Department. Then there is the Financial and Administrative Department which is managed by Anabela Ventura (reporting to the CEO and a non-executive partner⁵). Finally, Maria João Cruz and Nuno Artur Silva are responsible for the coordination of all creative projects. Please consult exhibit 1 to see the full organizational chart.

The CEO is the founding partner Nuno Artur Silva, as hierarchies tend to be avoided at PF, Nuno Artur does not feel himself to be at the top of the structure, “I wrote the title of CEO on my business cards just for fun!”. He is responsible for articulating the whole business, script-writing and for the “final cut” if there is a tie in terms of choices related with creative work, this is the only situation where there is a need for a clear and formal hierarchy of decision.

The idea that nourished the persistence of Nuno Artur Silva when he started PF was to conceive a privileged space to gather together different people with similar objectives. His main concern was to put people in touch that were willing to build something innovative in the fields of humour and fiction. Currently PF is highly diversified, not only in terms of projects, but also in the creative capabilities of all members.

According to José Ribeiro “Nuno Artur has a unique capability of getting things balanced in all those people. Obviously they have great creative capacity, they all know it, and as they all provide an activity for the general public, they all need to be recognized as highly creative. As is usually said, they have big egos, they want their name to be recognized by the market and by the public. To guarantee good work relationships with these people is not an easy affair, but Nuno can, because he has a capacity to gather people together who help him. He also has an ability to dialogue where he is able to impose to others a self-criticism through humour”. There is an obvious concern to understand “zones” of potential agreement or conflict in order to create great teams.

PF’s brand image is that of professionalism, due to the quality of writing and absolute fulfilment of deadlines imposed by the clients. Whenever there is a stressful situation there is a need to manage “ego land”⁶ with highly functional and clear rules to avoid wasting time. Therefore the new model implies cooperation at several levels to obtain a final decision on strategic issues.

⁵ José António Pinto Ribeiro.

⁶ Term commonly used by Nuno Artur and others to refer to the creative world of PF.

The creative work is organized in projects that can come from a client request or from a proactive initiative taken by the company. All projects have a deadline and to achieve these deadlines teamwork between the client, PF and other partners is necessary. There is no formal hierarchy between the members within a project besides the existence of a team coordinator. There are some teamwork rules established by the producers that are displayed in exhibit 2.

Because of the particular nature of the end client (newspaper, magazine, television, radio, and so on) there is no space for delay. The team coordinator is responsible for the accomplishment of deadlines and assumes the position similar to that of a musical producer (and not exactly team leader): this person is required to look over the ideas and make the necessary adaptations to deliver the final product. He/she also has the responsibility of making the final cut whenever there are doubts about a specific joke or idea.

There are several steps that are taken before initiating a project. It usually begins with a client's order for a series of scripts. The projects may also begin with ideas from the producers that, once accepted by PF, will be promoted until a client eventually buys them. The second step is the nomination by Nuno Artur Silva and Maria João Cruz of a team to write the scripts, and of a team coordinator. Only then do they deal with the business formalities and can begin the project.

The dominance of the project teams presents a danger that practices and knowledge could become localized and fragmented in such a way that information might be blocked within a project. However, team coordinators along with Nuno Artur Silva and Maria João Cruz ensure that knowledge is managed within and between project teams by sharing ideas and seeking variety in the team composition for each new project. Also informal conversations in the corridors of the company contribute to the dissemination of information.

The Creative Products

According to Maria João Cruz "to produce humour implies a certain irreverent predisposition to break rules, to rebel." Irreverent or not, the truth is that PF is known for its high quality scripts that have created a dramatic change in the established national comedy. A detailed list of some of the work done by this company can be seen

in exhibit 3. “Contra-Informação”, “Inimigo Público” and “Gato Fedorento” are some examples with greater visibility from this company (some images can be seen in exhibit 4).

Contra-Informação

In 2007 the fiction show Contra-Informação celebrated its 11th anniversary, which was remarkable for this kind of show, maintaining high audiences for such a long time.

The team behind the show initially included Nuno Artur Silva, José de Pina and Rui Cardoso Martins working for RTP with the guarantee of total editorial independence. They produced a daily comic show of 5 minutes composed of small sketches to parody politics, social and sport personalities using latex caricature puppets⁷.

“People think that our objective is to criticize politicians, but they are wrong; our objective is to create a critical patrimony that evolves from some figures whose faces are alike our rulers and that we put in unimaginable situations. It might be based on reality so that the audience can associate with it, but everything else is fiction, in order to make people laugh. This is the secret of the show’s longevity – our editorial independence, our mental independence: we don’t belong to any political party,” according to José de Pina.

“Contra-Informação” demands a rigorous daily routine: starting the day early; reading every newspaper; selecting the news with a greater degree of humour potential, coming up with the ideas to explore its potential and then writing the script.

PF’s producers without noticing or even consciously planning started a technique of political humour that has been spreading through several communication vehicles including other companies’ projects.

Until 2008 “Contra-Informação” continued to be a part of the Portuguese’s daily routine and explored the comic side of most public and political figures.

⁷ For examples of the sketches please consult the website <http://pftv.sapo.pt/showall/16/24/>.

Inimigo Público

“Inimigo Público” is a satirical newspaper distributed weekly with one of the most well-known daily Portuguese newspapers “Público”⁸.

The goal of “Inimigo Público” was to discover the comic side of the news by addressing reality from a humoristic stance without supporting any political sector in particular. This is one of the most collective projects to have been developed in the company with an extended row of authors that each Friday showed the public the news that “if it didn’t happen, could have happened.”⁹

Luis Pedro Nunes is the Director of “Inimigo Público” and besides guaranteeing the quality of the articles and the satisfaction of deadlines also imposes strict schedules on the team. Every Monday morning, all the writers are required to be present at 11 a.m. at PF headquarters full of great ideas, inspired by the newspaper “Expresso”¹⁰, by the comments of Professor Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa¹¹ or any other personality, in order to choose the themes that will appear in the newspaper.

The weekly meetings as described by Maria João Cruz may be viewed as “A battle of ideas. We are being evaluated, the best ideas are published, and whoever has the best ideas will have more work and more prestige... At least it’s good for our ego! But it is a battle and sometimes I’m afraid...”. Apparently Luis Pedro starts the meetings loudly requesting ideas until someone dares to share one even if the author is not completely convinced of it him/herself.

Even so, it is commonly accepted that the merit of “Inimigo Público” belongs to the Director who although can be brutal at times, manages to find an equilibrium and no one feels hurt. As a collective project, “Inimigo Público” translates as a group of people with different ideas led by a single person seriously focused on publishing a humoristic newspaper.

In 2004 “Inimigo Público” celebrated its first year of existence at the Tivoli theatre in Lisbon with a big party full of fans where “Gato Fedorento” performed several sketches on stage and with music provided by the band “Cebola Mol”. The party was such a

⁸ For examples please see the website <http://producoesficticias.pt/>.

⁹ Inimigo Público’s slogan.

¹⁰ Portuguese weekly newspaper.

¹¹ In 2008 every Sunday on RTP Prof. Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa comments on themes from actuality during his program “Marcelo Rebelo Sousa’s choices.”

success that it was shown several times on the Portuguese television channel SIC Comédia. In 2004 and in 2005 PF published two books that collected together several articles that originally appeared in “Inimigo Público”.

Gato Fedorento

The history of “Gato Fedorento” begins in 2003 in the PF courtyard where the four “gatos” (cats), Ricardo de Araújo Pereira, Zé Diogo Quintela, Tiago Dores and Miguel Góis, shared their free time investing in their own ideas, rehearsing comic moments and entertaining whoever walked in.

They created an internet blogspot to post their creativity and when the time came to choose a name for the blog, they decided to give it the name of a song that appeared on the American TV show Friends, called “Smelly Cat” which when translated into Portuguese is “Gato Fedorento”.

The strategy initially adopted by the producers was to promote “Gato Fedorento” as an independent project from PF and by producing a humoristic project they could compete directly with the company. According to Miguel Góis, since they were all freelancers with no professional ties to the company, they had creative freedom and could invest in independent ideas autonomously directed.

So on 29 April, 2003 they posted a message on their blog: ““Gato Fedorento” has nothing to do with PF. In fact the smelly cats write scripts for that company, but that is another story. In the blogspot world, what matters is the activity that, to put food on the table, each of us conducts during the day or at night, right? This is pertinent question that we leave for your reflection”.

This announcement caused a certain discomfort and tension within the company and so Nuno Artur decided to have a conversation with the authors of the blogspot. Basically, Nuno said that if they had nothing to do with the company then they were not doing anything there. The conflict was inevitable but it did not last long and soon after the solution became evident: “Gato Fedorento” would be an independent brand and PF would become their agent and producer.

After a while they were invited to produce comic sketches for a TV show on SIC Radical¹². Soon after, with their proven success they launched a DVD which gathered together all the episodes produced so far, “Series Fonseca”. At Christmas, 2004 the DVD achieved the top place in terms of national sales.

Behind all these successes there was an aura of ensured quality very similar to the one that characterized PF. The most alluring aspect for the four writers of “Gato Fedorento” is their writing independence and the knowledge that what they write is exactly what appears in the show. Also, their similarity and even friendship helped a lot “Our affinities are related with work, and with what we believe is funny, with the friendship that arose between us during these 4 years and also with the fact that we belong to the same generation and we all like football too. We meet a lot, even in our spare time, because our spare time is not that different from work.”

Until 2007 they had launched three new series of comic sketches and started a TV show that was broadcast every Sunday on prime-time: “Diz que é uma Espécie de Magazine”¹³. This show used a different format where humorists satirized themes from the news and presented several musical guests.

Managing Creativity

PF’s workforce and especially those from the creative world is not easily comparable to other companies. As Nuno Artur says “to manage these human resources is, above all, to manage strong egos”.

Although there is no formal hierarchy, the management of the “creatives” is Nuno Artur’s and Maria João Cruz’s responsibility. They interfere in the staffing process and every time there are disagreements that arise from the internal competition among “creatives”.

Staffing

PF is a company that sells creativity, but being such a subjective concept it is quite difficult to measure and even define. According to Nuno Artur, first of all there has to be a talent, a creative capacity that is innate in a certain person, some people have it,

¹² For examples of the sketches please consult the website <http://pftv.sapo.pt/showall/16/21/>

¹³ In English “They say that is a kind of magazine”.

some do not. Then the skill of observing is essential because a creative person is inspired by the world that surrounds him or her, that is the raw material. There is a need to pay attention to detail and to search for the comic side of any situation. The creative process is chaos, although some techniques may be identified (exhibit 5).

Nuno Artur Silva had long recognized that it took exceptional people to produce quality scripts. Since the beginning, when he started the company, he searched for any signs of creativity. At first he was the one that had to look for candidates, but now with such brand awareness, the company receives so many applications that Nuno Artur is considering hiring a person just to do a first screen. Nevertheless, as Nuno Artur says “I am always paying attention to what is being written not only in newspapers, but also on blogspots, and it’s not just me, we all keep looking for any signs of creativity”.

Carlos Fogaça, an expert in training, with the company growing at a fast pace suggested to Nuno Artur that courses in creative writing should be offered to the general public at the company’s installations with the objective of selecting new members for the team. In time these courses allowed for the discovery of amazing talents and the development of many others. The future “gatos fedorentos” Tiago Dores and José Diogo Quintela are examples of these discoveries.

These courses were also an opportunity for the producers Ricardo Araújo Pereira and João Barros to entertain themselves by playing crazy tricks on candidates and students. Once they sat in the waiting room with real candidates who were expecting an interview with Nuno Artur and pretended that they were also candidates and demonstrated loud disruptive behaviour, attaching a 50 € note to the enrolment form. Another time, João interrupted a class that Nuno Artur was teaching and appeared completely naked in front of the astonished students covered with some sheets of paper and asked Nuno if he could leave the scripts for Herman there or if they should be delivered somewhere else. When Nuno Artur was asked for some comments on the episode, he stated “I can’t remember it anymore. It must have been such a shock that I forced myself to forget...”

There are no specific requirements in terms of education or previous experience. In fact some diversity is present, the producers come from different backgrounds such as marketing, management, law, economics, journalism, publicity, literature and some have no specific academic background. “I am mostly interested in what they have produced from a creative point of view, I don’t care what they studied or where they

worked in the past, at most this information is interesting to assess personality. But objectively what counts is what they write,” says Nuno Artur.

Whenever Nuno Artur reads something he considers “funny” he asks for an opinion to 2 or 3 “creatives” and, if the opinion is also positive, the candidates are then asked to write a text on a specific topic, for example, a sketch for a “Herman” show or an article for “Inimigo Público”. This way they can test their creative performance. Once the scripts are approved the next step is to schedule an interview to get to know the person. Once the candidate has passed this phase he or she is placed on a “short-list” of possible collaborators and whenever there is an opportunity, if there are no associates or partners available for a project, the company makes a proposal to participate in a specific project. In time if they prove to be successful they are invited to become associates.

“The speech of the key” is the common designation for what is known as PF’s initiation ritual. According to the producer Luis Filipe Borges, “The speech of the key is a kind of Masonic ritual or a King Arthur’s knight nomination.... When we see the keys of the company in Nuno Artur’s hands, we know that is going to be a special day because we will become a part of PF. That gesture has a certain symbolism because it is the moment when Nuno, still holding the keys, goes through the company corridors with us and explains how the windows should be closed, reminds us that every time we leave the building we have to ensure that everything is closed, shows us all the rooms in detail, tells us several stories from the past that occurred in each of them and then, while he is explaining in detail how to activate and deactivate the alarm, he gives us the door keys for PF. In that moment we feel like knights ordained by the Queen of England.”

There is no planning in terms of hiring “creatives”, it depends on the number of projects the company is managing. More projects means more hiring. This flexibility is also applied in terms of work schedules. No one, besides the people from the Financial and Administrative Department (whose work period is similar to that commonly employed) has a fixed schedule. Not even the Directors. There are deadlines to accomplish and that is the only restriction. The “creatives” have total freedom to manage their working hours, they all have access to the company’s offices at any hour of the day so they can work all night and sleep all day if they so wish. Obviously, when there are meetings with clients or other companies, these usually occur during the daytime, so if necessary the “creatives” must be present.

There is an obvious effort to provide all the conditions to facilitate the creative process without imposing strict rules. Each “creative” decides his or her working hours and workload, given the opportunities they choose if they want to accept several projects, or fewer ones if they want to do other independent activities (like writing a book). The golden, and apparently only, rule is that regardless of the individual workload and work schedules, once a project is accepted it has to be finished and delivered within the agreed timeframes.

Development and Retention

PF is an example of an agency of authors and brands that represent authors by creating conditions for their work to evolve in two ways, proactively through authors with a specific idea who share it with Nuno Artur, who then tries to find a market for it. Or, through clients who order a certain project. In return the company requests exclusivity for their work. If authors are contacted directly to do a project, they should delegate all negotiations to PF. The development of skills and the opportunity to apply skills are therefore seen as a unique form of reward.

“There is a gain that I believe is fundamental, and sometimes, people are unaware of it, which is that the fact that the “creatives” are associated to the company meaning that they have a seat in strategic meetings and also a word to say about the strategic choices of the company. Their opinion is very important and taken into account.”, says Nuno Artur. There are two general meetings per year (January and September) and a third one in July before vacations which is more casual and works as a teaser for the “creatives” to start thinking about new ideas that could be developed in September.

Working with PF and being physically present in the office gives the “creatives” an opportunity to meet other “creatives” and a large number of people such as producers, singers and actors, building an important network that many times has provided the push for several other projects. Some examples that started this way are “O Gato Fedorento”, where three “cats” were already friends, but the fourth (José Diogo Quintela) was introduced to them and it was in the courtyard of the company that the first sketches were written, and the music band “Cebola Mol” formed by two “creatives”, Filipe Homem Fonseca and Eduardo Madeira, that met each other for the first time in the company corridors.

This network management is as important as the creativity production, because in other circumstances these people would not meet each other, from informal contacts ideas arise and projects begin. PF's role is to proportionate these meetings and develop the ideas with more potential. However, it is also true that for every 10 ideas, only one becomes a project.

Creativity, although in part may be innate to the PF producers, it also has to be stimulated by networking and exposure to different cultures and ways of thinking. Motivation arises from peer recognition of the quality of their work.

But, if some factors motivate the "creatives", others produce the opposite effect like the fact that the brand PF takes all the visibility from their work. On many occasions, when projects were mentioned in an article, the authorship was always attributed to PF or, at most, to PF's team. Another bone of contention relates to compensation, which is fully associated with the participation in projects and thus, can be very unstable, despite the company's efforts. In fact in the past some people, including associates, have had to leave PF because there was no work for them. Nevertheless, the company has always tried to manage these situations and find alternative positions for them in other companies.

Protecting the Past, Building the Future

In 2008 the company went through a transition phase, there were several challenges that Nuno Artur Silva faced during that time. Growth could mean a change in geographical focus or could mean a change in the scope of the product. With an output so intangible and with quality hard to determine or even predict, how could he overcome the ambiguity in measuring performance outcomes?

In a country with only 10 million people, extending overseas seems inevitable. As language is the major obstacle that could only be surpassed by hiring foreign "creatives" which would impose an additional challenge for management. "Act local, but think global" is the principle adopted by Nuno Artur Silva to explain the strategy of going abroad and accepting new challenges. But how can they replicate creativity in foreign cultures? Would Nuno Artur Silva's experience be enough?

Changing the scope of the product also seems inevitable. In 2008 the company was already investing more in other fields besides comedy, diversifying into the fields of

culture, new technologies, new media, books and so on. The initial idea of specialization to maintain quality evolved and new ways of thinking for the business were needed to sustain growth.

Regarding business specifics: some alternative approaches were being considered. Up until then product development normally occurred in response to some specific need from a client. The next step could be the distribution of the same idea through different communication channels such as radio and internet, and only after these, with greater awareness, through mass channels such as television (one example was the radio success “O Homem que mordeu o cão”¹⁴ that resulted in a book and a TV show).

Another possibility in terms of product is instead of selling an isolated script, to create a full package to offer TV stations or radio stations which includes scripts, the participation of actors and producers and studio production.

Also, and without compromising the logic of organicity, more growth may require more structure as proven in the past. But as knowledge sharing is such a strategic asset in a knowledge-intensive firm such as PF, more structure can create barriers which is hard to overcome. How can they combine organicity with functionality?

The main assets of a knowledge-intensive firm are the employees. This places a premium on satisfying the producers’ needs, and managing them in such a way that they are attracted to the company, they want to stay and they are highly motivated to perform well. As the company grows, to what extent can the development and retention practices approaches be sustained?

In July 2008 Nuno Artur Silva was preparing himself for the general meeting before the company started its vacation period. He wished to tease all the producers to encourage them to think of alternative ways for the company to sustain its growth. With a legacy composed of so many successes and such a strong focus on its “creatives”, the company has done well so far. However, the right strategy had to be found in order for PF to develop itself and adapt to new business realities without compromising its past and its creative potential. What would be the right strategy for the company to follow, one that would sustain its growth without compromising its culture?

¹⁴ In English “The man that bites the dog”.