

Maintenance services company: a brief reflection on the formation of a new company

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the recent past, there has been a substantial increase in the creation of new companies in Portugal. In fact, in 2019, the record for the establishment of new companies on the national scene was exceeded, with the formation of 48,854 new organizations, an increase of 6.4% compared to the previous year [1]. If we broaden the spectrum of this analysis, we can see the emergence of a growing trend starting in 2017.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, the spread of the new coronavirus, which Portugal was also unable to evade, had an unfavorable repercussion on the positive trend that had been noted in recent years. In fact, in the first four months of the year, only 13 084 new companies were registered, a decrease of 34.6% over the same time period [2]. Such a decline may be explained by the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the country, in particular due to the restrictions on economic activity imposed by the State of Emergency, which consequentially had harmful results on the economy.

The contents of this article, which centers around the creation of new companies developed in a period of economic crisis as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, may seem illogical to the reader. However, it is important to note that before this crisis, the country recorded an increase in the number new companies formed. The entrepreneurial and innovative spirit of the country has been recognized in recent years, so it is expected that, even in a challenging moment, new companies will continue to form or at least, will consider their establishment.

In view of the positive evolution in the creation of new organizations, this article intends to present some reflections on the creation of a new company, with special emphasis on the establishment of companies that provide maintenance services. Reading this article may be the first step for those wanting to set up such an organization.

2. BUILDING A COMPANY

Among startups and companies with traditional business models, 2019 was, as previously mentioned, a year in which the record for the formation of new companies in Portugal was surpassed.

Let us first start with the distinction between startups and companies with traditional business models. The main difference between a startup and a company with a traditional business model focuses, above all, on the respective business model. An organization's business model is nothing more than an assessment of the expenses necessary to produce something or provide a certain service and how it will be delivered to the end customer (price, payment methods, etc.).

With this definition in mind, according to Steve Blank [3], a startup seeks to make its business model repeatable and scalable, always combining the innovation factor alongside this, through the presentation of a new concept in the market and / or the use of a new technology. A repeatable and scalable business model represents a model that focuses on a product or service that can be sold to all customers and that allows the increase in the number of customers without significantly increasing operating costs. [4]

The significant increase in the number of startups in Portugal did not happen by chance, a series of measures were taken with the aim of turning the attention of international investors to the country. This path was soon followed by the establishment of the technology and innovation event 'Web Summit'. A series of financial support schemes for entrepreneurship were also set up by the Government, which contributed to the increase in the number of entrepreneurs in the country. Currently, Portugal also counts on the existence of several incubator and accelerator companies, which provide considerable support to the launch of new startups, through the provision of physical space, the sharing of connections, and programs for the development of business models.

But it is not only startups that are responsible for the progressive increase in the number of companies in Portugal, organizations with traditional business models also deserve their fair share of credit for this growth. In fact, despite having very different conceptions, they both have something in common: the challenges and difficulties inherent in opening their own business.

The first adversity that can be found after deciding to open a business is certainly the necessary financial investment. However, although this point centers around adversity, it should not be seen as an impediment. Effectively, any entrepreneur's initial focus should be on themselves and what they can bring to the business.

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According to Greg Fisher [5], there are four fundamental principles that must be followed when considering opening a business with little available capital for investment. First of all, the reader must analyze their most significant competences, the experience they have accumulated over the years, their level of knowledge and the resources they may have available to them. These questions must be answered carefully and thoughtfully as they will be your starting point in the process of opening your own business.

After this analysis, you should look at your list of contacts, considering how these can be an asset in creating your business, not only in the initial design phase, but also taking into account the construction of your future working team. You should try to choose the people who will help you based on the value they can bring and not based on personal connection. According to Jim Collins [6], one of the points that characterizes excellent management is the selection of the right people for the team even before the introduction of the strategy to be followed by the company. The most important asset of a company is not the people, but the right people.

Naturally, the initial economic investment should also be considered. The eventual success that the company may have is quite uncertain and impossible to predict. Only invest an amount that, if it does not provide return on investment, does not have many negative implications for you. Following this idea, it is even advisable to start the project of your new company in parallel with your current job.

The fourth and final point is that the reader must always have an open mindset whereby change is possible. You should always be willing to change processes, procedures or even the product, in order to adapt to changes in consumer preferences, legislation or even in the evolution of technological processes. This way, you will be closer to being successful.

3. CONSTITUTION OF A MAINTENANCE SERVICES COMPANY

The four topics referenced in the previous point are also valid and essential when one intends to establish a maintenance services company. In addition to these, other factors exist that may contribute in a favorable way to the company's success.

In accordance with the first principle referred to in the previous point, the reader's skills should be taken into account when defining the type of service to be provided by your company: Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC), maintenance of industrial equipment, electricity services, etc. But this is not the only aspect of defining your

company's expertise. It is advisable to carry out a careful analysis of the geographic area where you will establish your business, in order to identify potential competitors that are already established in the market and, simultaneously, one should recognize the existing needs in that area and possible shortcomings as well.

The next step will be the choice of your employees and, for that, your contacts, will be able to play a fundamental role in this stage. Choose specialized and qualified employees for the areas of management (backoffice) and maintenance - HVAC technicians, electricity technicians, among others, depending, of course, on the area of action of your organization. In addition to the maintenance team, the company will also have to have at least the following areas: administrative, financial, commercial and marketing. An account management function, though inessential, can be an asset when it comes to the development of commercial and interpersonal communication between the company and its customers, which can also facilitate renewals of contracts and recommendations from current customers to potential customers.

Regardless of the type of business, it is essential to find factors that distinguish your company from its competitors. In this regard, maintenance technicians may have a fundamental role, since they are the ones who will have direct contact with their customers. Thus, in addition to having to ensure that the maintenance work is carried out at the highest possible standard, they must also interact with the customer - explain the work that needs to be completed, recommend a plan of action that extends the longevity of the equipment - so that they believe you are providing them added value and not just a simple maintenance service.

The acquisition of a computerized maintenance management system (CMMS) is also a distinctive and highly important factor, allowing the management of the entire operational component of the company. Through the use of such a system, you will be able to control all maintenance work to be carried out on your customers, manage your human and material assets (control of stock levels of parts for maintenance) and also prepare reports on the various interventions.

Focusing on this last point, the use of a CMMS also provides the customer with a platform where they can follow, in real time, the maintenance work to be carried out, the state of the equipment (in operation, under maintenance, etc.), register and report anomalies, and control the supplier's response time based on the previously defined service level - Service Level Agreement (SLA).

4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The number of companies created in Portugal has been increasing in recent years. Despite a natural slowdown due to the pandemic induced by the new coronavirus, in the near future, this trend is expected to reach expectations et prior to this situation.

Although the initial investment is indispensable for the creation of a new company, it is, above all, imperative that you plan and study the organization's formation process. Hence, the focus must firstly be centered on the reader and on four points that must be followed when starting your new company:

- Explore your skillset
- Use your contact list
- Invest only what you can lose
- Be receptive to change

During any activity, it is essential that one can differentiate your company from its competitors. In the case of a maintenance service company, this differentiation can be achieved in several ways - the various areas of the company must comprise qualified employees; maintenance technicians, when visiting customers' premises, they must demonstrate an attitude that leaves the customer feeling that they received added value and not simply a maintenance service: their maintenance technicians will be the face of your company for customers; the use of a CMMS contributes greatly to promoting a positive image of your company, showing organization, management and operational control, whilst also allowing you to provide your customers with a platform where they will be able to follow, in real time, the evolution of work and report damage of their assets.

The path to be followed for the establishment of a new company is arduous and difficult, it will require a lot of willpower and perseverance, with

plenty of uncertainty since it is impossible to predict the level of success that will be achieved. A careful planning procedure before starting the process is a key element that will help with the overall success of the business. However, you should try to remain receptive to possible changes in processes or your company's strategy, in order to achieve solid and sustainable results that will help you to achieve success.

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