PONTO.CRÍTICO

José Epifânio da Franca

José Epifânio da Franca was born in Lisbon in 1955 and moved to São Tomé and Príncipe at the age of 6, where he lived until he was 16. In 1971, he returned to Lisbon, completed the 7th year at Liceu Camões, and in 1972, he enrolled in the Electrical Engineering course at Instituto Superior Técnico. He graduated in 1978 and was immediately recruited as a part-time assistant at IST, first in the Systems and Computers Section and then in the Electronics Section. At the invitation of Prof. Manuel de Medeiros Silva, who introduced him to scientific research, he also joined the Center for Applied Electronics at the Technical University of Lisbon (CEAUTL). In 1980, he was admitted to the Central Laboratory of Sacavém at EDP (Electricity of Portugal), maintaining his role as a part-time invited assistant and continuing his scientific research at CEAUTL. In the summer of 1981, he interned at Imperial College, and in 1982, he accepted a doctoral scholarship to conduct a research project sponsored by British Telecom. As a doctoral student at Imperial College, he was awarded the Overseas Research Student Award in 1983 and 1984. He completed his doctorate in 1985, specializing in analog switched-capacitor electronic circuits and systems, and returned to Portugal.

He began his academic career at IST in September 1985 as an Assistant Professor, founding and leading the Integrated Circuits and Systems Research Group. He obtained his Habilitation in Electrical Engineering and Computers from the Technical University of Lisbon in 1992 and became a Full Professor at DEEC of IST in 2000.

In 1996, in recognition of his scientific and advanced training activities, he was elected as an IEEE Fellow, the first in Portugal. Later, in 1999, he received the IEEE Circuits and Systems Jubilee Award, recognizing the top 100 researchers worldwide who had the most impact in 50 years of the society's activity. He was also globally elected as a member of the Board of Governors of the Circuits and Systems Society and appointed as a Distinguished Lecturer from 1997 to 2000.

Faced with the lack of national employability of scientific and technological knowledge produced, he felt the responsibility to create solutions that would enable entrepreneurial activity in the semiconductor industry in Portugal. This process culminated on February 3, 1997, with the creation of Chipidea Microelectronics, believing that the eventual success of the bold, risky, and unsupported initiative would inevitably contribute to changing the lives of young electronic engineers and retaining that valuable talent in Portugal.

Chipidea positioned itself in the area of analog-to-digital interfaces, aware that digital information processing, pioneered by the IBM Personal Computer, critically depended on the "connection" to the physical world around us. Observing a global shortage of engineers with training in analog electronics, the technology, market, and people defined the "virtuous triangle" that Chipidea successfully developed, leading to global market leadership in 2004.

Ten years after its founding, the company, which started with 3 engineers, had over 350 engineers worldwide in 2007, serving the top 20 semiconductor companies as clients. In that year, Chipidea was acquired by the American company MIPS Technologies Inc., a global leader in Reduced Instruction Set Computing (RISC) processors, entering the NASDAQ and allowing the disinvestment of venture capital that had supported its development. In 2008, MIPS initiated the divestiture of Power Management technology, giving rise to an opportunity seized by Floriberto Lima and Marcelino Santos to create a new startup, Silicon Gate.

José Epifânio da Franca then returned to IST, mainly to be with "his" students and share incredible stories with them. What he is most proud of is not the awards but knowing that many other startups originating from Chipidea emerged in Portugal and around the world, achieving the mission he set out: "to change the lives of people and anchor valuable talent in Portugal."

To all students, he leaves the following message: "Life is made of opportunities, and we do not control them. What we can do is be prepared for when they come our way. [...] Believe in yourselves and that you can be among the best. The decision is yours and no one else's."

Epifânio da Franca is truly a Great Mind.

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