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COMPETITIVENESS IN ITS ENTIRETY

The capacity of a company to attract to itself the attention of customers due to the perceived value of products and services it offers, when compared to the competition, is the definition provided for “competitiveness” in *Dicionário Aurélio*, one of the most traditional Portuguese language dictionaries.

A series of concepts is embedded in this explanation. For example, attracting to itself the attention of customers does not only mean doing something well done, since all competitors seek to do this. Attracting their attention towards our companies means doing something different and, for such, a considerable amount of creativity that leads to innovation is necessary.

Continuing with our reflection, when referring to the perceived value of products and services, this does not mean low prices, but rather provide sustainable gains to the value chain of customers, something that is not necessarily obtained through low prices. Quite the contrary, in the majority of cases, low prices mean gains in the very short-term that do not sustain improvements that are based on product and process yield improvements.

In summary, we cannot talk about competitiveness in the short term. Competitiveness is a process that only achieves satisfactory results when continuously worked to obtain improvements in the pursuit of operational excellence. In fact, our unbeatable forestry competitiveness was achieved through considerable work of improving processes in the long-term.

And innovative work, aimed at further improving productivity per planted hectare and developing new forestry products, continues being done. If today our energy grid is more than 80% based on renewable fuels, this is because somebody worked for many years on innovative processes in the pursuit of such condition.

Examples, like these, presented here for reflection are abundant in our pulp and paper sector. However, what I would like to emphasize is what’s behind this entire continuous improvement process.

For starters, a clear and shared **Vision** among all company employees. In this case, people are not

simply supposed to be part of the process, but rather be committed to it, from the time it is implemented, and see to that it is maintained.

Well-defined **Processes**, always up-to-date and improved, targeting the elimination of waste is a key-aspect in the pursuit of productivity. Additionally, creativity and innovation lend the differentiation necessary in the pursuit of unique products and services.

The **Problem Resolution** process is also important in seeking competitiveness. All processes are subject to problems. Companies that seek excellence need to have resolution procedures that not only resolve problems, but that also use problems as a source for continuous improvement learning.

And lastly, it is **People** in this continuous improvement context that play a key role, since there isn’t any competitiveness seeking process that is not based on people. It is necessary to count on employees that not only have information, but also have knowledge to share. And this requires much more integration among everyone in the organization that leads to a stage of commitment with the continuous improvement process.

At present, our leaders and managers are impelled to think and act in the short term, due to existing market impositions. However, we must insist that competitiveness is only achieved through a continuous process based on a clear Vision of the future. And this is the greatest challenge in our sector. To imagine what we will be in the next couple of years and ensure continuity of our competitiveness.

ABTCP is engaged in this pursuit, offering courses that provide information to our coworkers. Additionally, ABTCP is a forum where trends are discussed, disseminating knowledge and promoting the creation of a vision of the future for our sector.

As such, I invite everyone who wishes to participate in the construction of our future to join us in our Technical Committees, participate in our courses, exchange ideas and suggestions. This way we will undoubtedly continue working so that our sector grows even more, always ensuring a competitive position within the global scenario. ■