

## **Strategic Focus: Growth vs. Stabilisation**

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Striving for both growth and stabilisation, risk/gain and safety, or freedom and security, for example, is a non-trivial process of choice, experimentation, reflection, and adjustment. Crucial to achieve that balance is to know oneself, and aim to improve the only thing we have control on: ourselves. Not that the surrounding environment can be neglected or doesn't play a role, but most external conditions cannot be modified or adjusted at will, whereas our internal awareness, attitudes, actions, and reactions largely depend on... us!

Internally, our values and working standards should be crystal clear to everyone at INESC TEC. Not focusing on abstract concepts of "excellence" or "integrity" but on how they are reflected on day-to-day work. What are our standards for meeting attendance, for internal communication, for documenting decisions, for meeting deadlines, for email management and expected response times? Do we have them, and if yes, are we all well aware of them?? At the internal level, there's much room for improvement on standards, and above all their clear communication and consistent implementation...a good example of a lost opportunity for improvement is our performance evaluation system, in a lengthy and timid process of renewing without actual change of status quo.

Externally, the situation is complex and highly uncertain. We faced big challenges before and have overcome them graciously. In stormy weather, one does not navigate at full sail, on the contrary, one runs under reduced sail. One attempts to avoid facing the storm directly, and some adjustments to the trajectory can be attempted, but if the required detour is so large one would lose the intended destination, it becomes necessary to prepare for and face the storm – with a committed crew, strong leadership, and courage.

Sustainability is a big word for INESC TEC. I enjoy having it printed in well designed tote bags and beautiful "INESC TEC-blue" lettering everywhere. I also understand the core concern of *financial* sustainability. The idea is fairly easy to grasp: no one wants (well, except maybe some banks or very wealthy individuals) to be in debt or unable to meet their financial commitments. But no one wants to live just / mainly for that, in survival mode. Constantly worrying and focusing on getting more funding, to sustain a big structure, and making it bigger, so that more money can come (with more financial obligations) in a mindset of constant, never-ending growth, requiring ever more resources and efforts... that's not sustainable living - it's unsustainable survival leading to extinction, if not immediately, mediately. Looking into evolution in the natural world, the ones that have survived are not the most fit, most adapted animals (too much specialisation is a risk in evolutionary terms)... the biggest and strongest are not always the winners - the most successful animals on earth are actually... the friendliest! Think of dogs, and emperor penguins...Fostering internal competition over friendliness is a red flag.

INESC TEC is/should be a much bigger and significant whole than the sum of centres and of TECs and of scientific domains... and beyond strategic documents, work plans, working groups and guidelines, we should do, implement – even if the implementation is not perfect... then correct, adjust, do better... with no aversion to risk, no fear of failure... in-line with our own DNA of doing rather than saying/thinking about doing it. Example of risk aversion and courage needs to come from above, in everyday implementation of our standards, of our strategy, close and regular monitoring of the strategic plan, and clear communication of its progress and required adjustments.