

# The Lafarge Learning & Development Network

*A collaborative effort to develop and implement organization wide vision, strategy and practices on Learning & Development*

Clement Leemans

## Summary & Context

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In 1999 Lafarge, number one producer of building materials in the world, reorganizes into five business divisions and decentralizes a number of HQ functions and roles. As Director Learning & Development, I was asked to develop a vision and strategy for Learning, build an organization to support that vision and facilitate 'Learning and Development interventions' throughout the organization.

Due to an intensive program of recent acquisitions there was a need to pull the 60 business units (countries) together and develop an overall vision, strategy and processes in several major areas as technology, finance, HR, management practices, etc...

From the beginning we excluded a 'corporate university' type of approach, with large catalogues of central training programs. Our vision on learning and development was based on 'learning from experience', maximize involvement, learning embedded in the managerial processes, learning as the result of working together (social constructivism), etc... Our aim was to build a 'learning organization'.

In line with that vision on learning, we wanted to shape an L&D organization that was able to drive the 'learning organization'. This L&D organization was based on three pillars :

- In each unit a L&D manager. He/she consults management on learning & organizational development and facilitates learning interventions in his/her unit
- The network of unit L&D managers. A vehicle to develop vision, strategy and skills on learning, facilitation and process consulting & share experiences
- A small central L&D team to support the network, provide leadership and consult the L&D managers in the units. We deliberately kept this team small (5 people in an organization of 85.000) to avoid the team from taking over and killing involvement of network members.

## Objectives

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The L&D network was a crucial instrument in developing a vision on learning, where managers and teams were drivers of their own development, based on the collective reflection on their work reality and experience. We tried to position the network as the driver for organizational learning in Lafarge. The main objectives of our work with / as network were :

- Developing a common vision & values on learning and development from which each BU could derive it's own business related learning strategy
- Creating a platform and energy to implement the vision on learning and development in all BU's
- Developing and distributing company wide tools and methodology for learning (coaching, intervention, instructional design processes, ...)
- Developing the competencies of the L&D community (internal consulting, process interventions, instructional design, facilitation, change management, ...)
- Involving newly acquired businesses and give new L&D managers a chance to contribute rapidly to the Learning and Development community and allow them to have a 'jump start' in their new position fueled by experiences, tools, methodology, ... from colleagues in the network.
- Sharing experiences and knowledge between BU's : learn from diversity in the network

## A context for collaboration

The fact that the 'L&D function' still had to be created within the Cement Division, was an opportunity to 'mark the difference' from what happened before and create a 'new context' for the L&D managers in the units in terms of :

- vision, strategy and interventions on learning and development
- their own role and responsibility
- the 'attitude' and 'role' of the central Learning & Development team
- the working relations in between unit L&D managers

Focus	Before	Now
Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Training delivery</li> <li>▶ Bank concept model</li> <li>▶ HR driven</li> <li>▶ Content focused</li> <li>▶ Centralized</li> <li>▶ Isolated from business</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Learning organization</li> <li>▶ Experiential learning</li> <li>▶ Social Constructivism</li> <li>▶ Linked to the business</li> <li>▶ Management driven</li> <li>▶ OD approach</li> <li>▶ Process focused</li> </ul>
Unit L&D role & responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Capture demands</li> <li>▶ Organizing</li> <li>▶ Logistics</li> <li>▶ Order External Training providers</li> <li>▶ Purely local role</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Build local development strategy</li> <li>▶ Needs analysis</li> <li>▶ Intervention design</li> <li>▶ Internal consulting</li> <li>▶ Process facilitation</li> <li>▶ Contribute to 'company vision' on learning and development</li> <li>▶ Participant in global learning community</li> </ul>
Attitude / Role of Central L&D team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Organizer central training programs</li> <li>▶ Control 'compliance' of units with central training 'prescriptions'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Support &amp; consult</li> <li>▶ Build vision</li> <li>▶ Pull people together and facilitate sharing, collaboration, ...</li> <li>▶ Advocate the vision and approach with central and local management</li> <li>▶ Facilitate their job (tools, communication channels, pass on info, ...)</li> </ul>
Working between L&D managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Unexisting (or coincidental between two units)</li> <li>▶ Not supported in any way</li> <li>▶ All 'overall initiatives' have to come from or be controlled by the central organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Seen as a way to learn</li> <li>▶ Seen as 'official policy' and supported and induced in many ways</li> <li>▶ Take cross 'unit' responsibility (one unit does things for the 'community')</li> </ul>

From the start we created 'direction' by clearly stating the main elements of Lafarge's vision on learning & development and communicated our changed vision and expectations on the role of unit L&D Managers.

But at the same time we offered our 'help and assistance' as central L&D team to help unit L&D managers to cope not only with those changed expectations but also with the operational demands coming from their local management.

## Collaborative strategies

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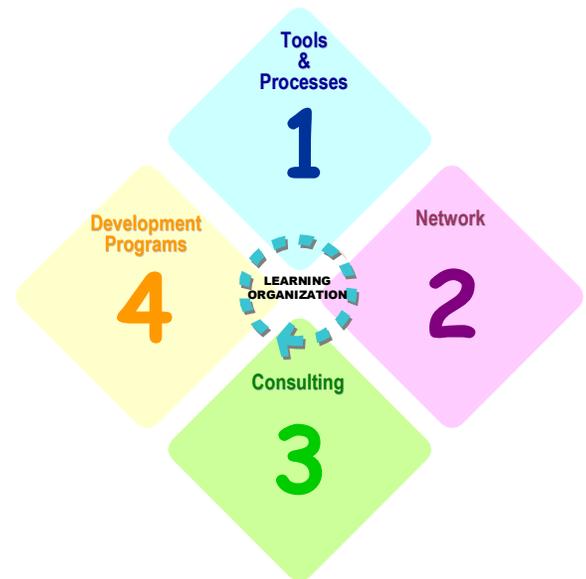
In order to really create a 'network' that is capable of building a common vision and implementing a company wide global strategy, you need more than a few 'network meetings'. We needed a 'common practice' throughout the L&D community. We deployed four strategies to make that happen, which we presented as 'levers for learning' for the organization.

Those levers were seen as ways to create a common identity for the approach and intervention of learning throughout the organization irrespective of where the intervention originated: locally in the units or as a central initiative.

### 1. Common tools, methodologies and processes

The network becomes real through the common use of a number of tools, methodologies and processes. Some of these were proposed by the central team, some of them were collectively developed as an initiative of the network, or could be a 'unit L&D tool' shared through the network with all other units. A few examples :

- ◆ *A methodology for needs analysis and contracting with internal customers*
- ◆ *Coaching methodology and tools (coaching guide)*
- ◆ *Instructional materials and workshop design for implementing the new performance management process*
- ◆ *An intranet with several functions as : share good practices, post materials, tools, etc.. for sharing, open up local / central training programs for enrollment from other units, ...*



### 2. L&D Network Activities

The network becomes a reality also, through the actual meeting, discussing, sharing and working together 'in the flesh'. Every six months we convened as a network. These network activities were not 'congress' type of activities but were shaped as 'learning organizations' in itself, where we tried to 'live' the vision on learning and development in the organization. A few examples of activities and methodologies :

- ◆ *Project work (developing tools, materials, designs, etc... for use throughout the organization)*
- ◆ *Intervision (to learn from each other, but also to live the methodology in order to use it in the units)*
- ◆ *Experiential games and activities*
- ◆ *Role play and simulations (ex : internal consulting, needs analysis, ...)*
- ◆ *Share and present local initiatives, experiences with others*
- ◆ *Brainstorm, mind map, ... (to translate vision on learning into effective interventions)*
- ◆ *Regional meetings to coordinate and collaborate on 'regional level'*
- ◆ *Individual coaching and feedback*
- ◆ *Workshops on specific skills for L&D managers (sometimes specifically geared to new members / new methodology, or to introduce a new initiative, ...)*

*I still remember the very first preparation meeting. There we decided that the network meetings should be work meetings where the participants should be connecting and working together on common issues, in stead of info sessions with lectures from morning till evening and where participants are audience and consumers. The basic premise here was: a network is about working and should be made by participants. This was a new perspective that raised many questions: will participants accept the role of co-maker? what does it mean for the team in Lyon to prepare and facilitate such a meeting?*

*The team took up this challenge. They created a totally new experience for themselves and all participants. They were exhausted in every sense of the word at the end of this meeting. I witnessed their hard work, stress and accomplishments. The Training managers who participated, did not notice this. In their perspective 'facilitating a meeting' meant 'delivering a presentation', their focus was on content. The hard work in preparing a meeting scenario and facilitating working together went mostly unnoticed. The work of me as external consultant, being mostly behind the scenes, was witnessed with amazement: why is our company paying this guy? He is not running the meeting!*

*Later on, this changed. The participants were getting more used to the way of working, gradually took on a more active role, were able to see what was happening, and developed a sense of the process. This was an important, and maybe even the most important, learning from the network meetings.*

Paul Keursten, external consultant

### 3. Internal Consultancy Practice

Designing a consulting practice, was seen as a lever to engage the organization in their reflection on learning and development and supporting management in driving learning in the organization. It was seen as an opportunity for the central team to actually work with the business unit managers and at the same time to create a common practice with the L&D managers from the network.



We developed four areas of consulting :

- ◆ *Accompanying (process) major project, change efforts, improvement initiatives in the organization, like implementing company wide 'performance improvement programs, support integration of newly acquired business, implement new safety culture and practices, etc...*
- ◆ *Helping networking communities within the organization to develop an effective collaborative process*
- ◆ *Supporting local interventions with specific instructional expertise around coaching, training design, needs analysis methodology, intervention, developing job-aids, etc...*
- ◆ *Advising HR and L&D managers in the units on how to develop a learning culture in their organizations*

By always associating the BU L&D manager to the consulting work done in his unit by the central L&D team we manage to :

- Accompany new appointed L&D managers in taking their role as 'process consultant' in the organization
- Boost their confidence in their new role as L&D managers (very different from the logistic and administrative role they had before)
- Build their credibility with their local business management
- Develop a common and consistent OD consulting practice throughout the organization
- To build an internal customer relationship with business management

#### 4. Company Wide Interventions

As fourth lever, we introduced a limited number of worldwide 'development tracks' for several reasons :

- ◆ *They served as examples of experiential instructional design for the L&D community.*
- ◆ *They offered an opportunity to work with the L&D unit managers on projects for the organization as a whole (not only their unit)*

We avoided to position those programs as 'central programs' by :

- ◆ *Having them organized by a 'host L&D manager' in a unit inviting participants from all other units*
- ◆ *Using local faculty from that unit, giving a clear signal that everybody can learn from everybody in this organization.*

*"I think our network has been contributing so much to the Group, because we managed to introduce effective L&D processes and programs. We were good at benchmarking and sharing best practices. (...)*

*I remember well that, when I joined the network, just after Lafarge acquired the South Korean operations, I felt embarrassed. (...), my English was terrible and furthermore I had no knowledge or experience in training. But I came into a community with ongoing projects around coaching, performance management, leadership development, etc... and above all there was the 'network members', colleagues from other BU's, helping me with Train the Trainer activities, useful material, advice, information... My Chinese colleague came over to support and to work with me.*

*In de beginning I needed that very much, and now some years later I feel confident and comfortable in my job, and I am able to contribute and even to 'coach' my new colleagues in the region."*

SukJu Kim, L&D Manager Lafarge South Korea

It was amazing to see how the simple fact of 'trusting' local L&D managers and faculty, to deliver a company wide program, created enthusiasm and sense of belonging to the 'L&D community'.

To create and maintain their energy to 'uphold' these company wide programs we made sure we limited the number of programs and focused on common needs and target groups. We needed 'projects' that were priorities for all units in order for people to put their efforts in and not consider it as 'extra work' or something they were forced into. We focused on :

- ◆ *Development of new plant engineers*
- ◆ *Development of newly appointed plant managers*
- ◆ *Development of newly appointed team leaders*
- ◆ *Development of 'technical consultants' in the Technical Centers*

## Critical Success Factors

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After five years of working with that network, with hindsight, I would list the following elements as success factors :

- Create ongoing opportunities for network members to actually 'work with each other', have experiences in common so they have something to share, to embrace, to care for during the meetings.
- Clear leadership and direction from the beginning and then build gradually to a more shared leadership
- Give guidance and leadership in terms of 'vision' and process, but avoid creating a 'semi-hierarchical' relationship. Make sure network members do not perceive the central team as 'controllers', making sure the 'central policies' are well implemented. But to the contrary, position the leadership as 'consulting support' for issues and difficulties the L&D managers encounter in their businesses.

*"I came in the network, originally as technical trainer. I had no background in training and everything I know now comes from network meetings, joint projects, information available through the network and discussions with other network colleagues. (...) I still remember a role-play where we took on the role of training manager to work with an internal customer on his 'training demands'. What a difference with what I used to do. This was actually consulting in stead of 'taking his request down'. (...)*

*I tried to implement this new approach in the organization but it was not easy, as it was something new and unusual. Referring to the network and the fact that it was an approach introduced through the network, created for me the possibility to try new things, it gave me the credibility to do it. (...)*

*Now I can explain to others what 'networking' means and what is the difference with 'meeting'. (...)*

*Being part of the network became even a reference in the organization. It helped me get a L&D job elsewhere in the organization. They didn't only bring me in, but also the experience and tools of the network. (...)*

*Coming in the network as 'rookie' was not easy, I was really challenged, but that challenge helped me make progress. The way the network is 'driven' and activities are organized is key, to make it 'network' and not just a chain of meetings.*

Alexey Ermishkin, former L&D Manager Lafarge Russia

- Don't build the 'collaborative work' only from the needs of corporate headquarters. Make sure that the individual members and their respective businesses see direct added value for them, in the different projects you launch.
- Make sure 'network activities' are integrated fully in the local priorities of people. Network members will not have the support of their local hierarchy if their effort in the network is not crucial for the local business and a priority for the hierarchy. It will be seen as 'extra work' as a sort of 'hobby' and therefore will not be sustainable.
- Communicate and work where possible also with the 'bosses' of the network members (in this case the Unit HR Directors)
- The design of the network activities and the way you 'lead' the process needs to be in line with the vision on learning and development: very experiential, participative, open and confronting, supportive, ...

- As central team, or corporate L&D director, do not work with Unit business managers, without fully involving the unit L&D manager. Otherwise you alienate the unit L&D manager from his/her own internal customers and hurt him in his/her credibility as internal consultant towards unit management.
- This network was in the first place about work, but it only worked because we developed a real interest in each other as persons and colleagues and took our time during our activities to invest in each other personally (room for really meeting each other)

## Activity proposed to you during MOPAN conference

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- **TESTIMONY** : introduction to the reality of the L&D network in Lafarge, with examples of projects, activities, methodology we used, etc...
- **BE NETWORK** : An intervision session where people can 'tap into each others experience' and work together on issues they have in their network.
- **SHARE LESSONS LEARNED** : Brainstorm around two or three major 'Issues' like conditions for productiveness, shared leadership, deal with diversity and share my perspective on that from the Lafarge experience.

Attached to this paper, as illustration of how the methodologies of intervision, coaching and experiential learning can be used as part of collaborative strategies, we added two original documents written as 'good practice' to communicate throughout the organization :

**Appendix 1** : describes how in the work of the L&D network, intervision was used as a practice for the network but also as an intervention strategy towards the internal customers of the network

**Appendix 2** : shows how a common initiative, in this case the Cement Professionals Development Program, can be a driver for the vision on learning and a lever to develop the collaboration in the network.

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# Appendix 1 : Intervision : peer-sharing

## What is it?

Intervision or 'peer-sharing' is a small group activity for 4 to 6 people. It allows people to get input from their peers on issues and problems. The main objectives are :

- To share problems, questions, concerns with colleagues
- To develop the skills and insights of people who try to look for solutions
- To help others to look at their problem from an other angle and develop new types of solutions
- To strengthen solidarity between people facing similar challenges

## When should it be used:

It can be used in different contexts : formal training session, network activities, regular 'sharing moments' between colleagues, for team development, etc... It can also be used to support each other in introducing a new 'process or methodology' like Advance Self-assessment, coaching, etc...

## How to do it:

During an intervision session each participant brings one issue. The session can be done with or without a facilitator. In either case, sticking to the allocated time is crucial for the effectiveness of the exercise. This stops the group from dwelling on details. The group spends 30 minutes on each issue.

1. One of the participants ( the issue owner) introduces an issue, which can be a new challenge or a problem that he or she is facing (3 min.). Make sure it is an ongoing issue and not just history.
2. The other participants then ask questions to clarify particular points and to find out more about the topic (10 min.).
3. The group then starts brainstorming on possible ways of approaching the problem, and possible solutions to try. A paperboard is useful to capture ideas, making them 'visible' throughout the process. The issue owner is invited to listen and to take in the proposals without going into the discussion (10 min.)
4. Based on the brainstorming, the group then makes a number of recommendations and suggestions to the issue owner (2 min.).
5. The issue owner can then give feedback on what he/she has heard from the group: how does this help or not help, what can he/she take away from the exercise, etc. (5 min.)

You can do a 'full session' where every participant brings in one 'issue' and which will than last about 3 hours for a group of five. You can also decide to one's 'issue' at the time and take turns. In this case it is of course important to have 'regular sessions' for instance every 2 weeks in order for everybody to 'tap' into the brain of his peers.

## Benefits:

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### Intervision allows people to:

- Share information, tools, working methods
- Solve problems
- Bring new standpoints, new ideas when others are 'stuck'

### Intervision develops:

- Active listening, Empathy and Questioning skills
- Creative thinking and innovative problem solving
- Synthesizing skills, Teamwork and solidarity between professional peers

## Peer-Sharing in the Cement Division : a few examples

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**Cement Professionals Development Track :** after 6 months of 'on-the-job' activities in the plant our new engineers join an international 'Training Session' which allows them to 'process' their plant experience and with the help of experts understand 'principles of producing cement'. They agree up-front with their coach 'a project or assignment'. In the T-session they form 'Peer sharing' groups where they help each other looking for ways to develop their projects, ask the right questions, apply the learnings of the session, etc...

**L&D Managers Network Meetings :** during the Network Meetings of the Unit L&D Managers, intervision helps them to get a new 'angle' on the issues they have and tap into the experience of people who are confronted with similar issues in the different units.

**CTEC 2002 Performance Days :** The CTEC experts and relation directors as well as the Unit and Plant managers, used the 'peer coaching' technique to learn from each other and get some coaching from colleagues on specific performance problems.

**Getting Your Expertise Across :** in the development track for 'experts and advisors' from the Technical Centers and the functional expertise groups, intervision is used to help the managers of the participants cope with issues they encounter in developing and 'coaching' their direct reports towards a more effective 'internal consulting' relationship with the operations they work for.

**Learning & Development Team :** with a lot of different consulting projects, training programs to design etc.. it is very difficult and time consuming to 'brief' everybody constantly. In order however not to 'eliminate' the contribution of all team members, intervision is used in the L&D team to create short 'brainstorms' on specific 'projects'. It is a very quick way of gathering a number of ideas, somebody of the team can work on and it keeps everybody involved in what others are doing.

# Appendix 2 : Coaching as the driver for Learning

*Introducing coaching practices to develop engineers in the Cement Division  
A Good Practice.*

## Context

Through acquisitions and with the steady growth of the Lafarge business, a lot of new engineers are entering the Cement Division every year. The danger is that the development of these new engineers is not properly looked after and that it takes 2 to 3 years before they can really contribute to the business. It becomes necessary therefore, to ensure that their development is well managed, and that they contribute greatly towards the continued performance of the Lafarge business.

## Challenge

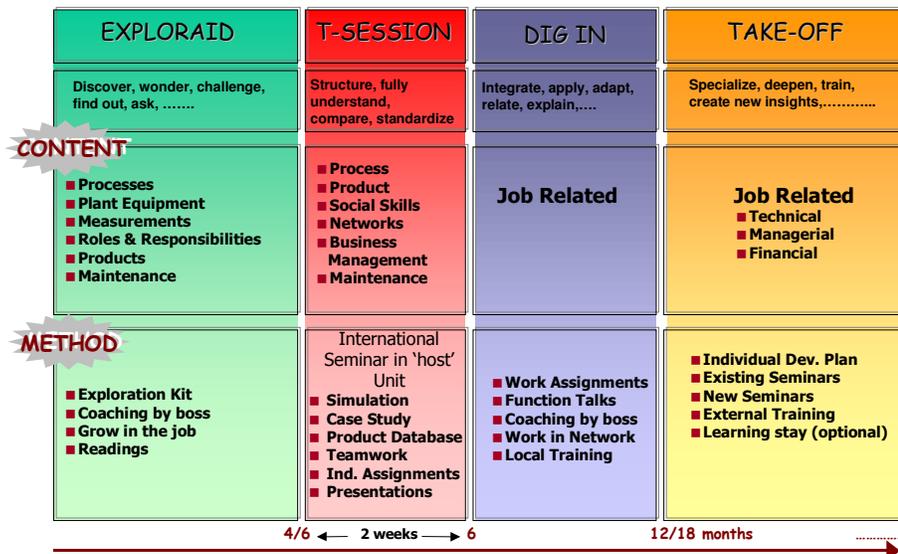
The challenge for the Division therefore, is to ensure that this employee population is worldwide developed in a structured way, fast and in line with the business needs, in order that they quickly become effective, become autonomous and take up responsibility very early in their careers.

Keeping in mind also the vast differences in the business units, in resources, competencies and technological advancement, it is also necessary to ensure that every engineer, regardless of location, is exposed to the same challenges and given the same basics and foundation on cement manufacturing. Early exposure to the Lafarge know-how, databases and benchmarking becomes very key to all new engineers in this respect in order that they develop and are aware of Lafarge best practices.

## Solution

The solution was to create a formalized coaching track for all the newly hired plant engineers. The objective was that the direct bosses would become coaches : set challenging objectives, question and follow up on a regular basis and give feedback in order to improve behaviors and competencies that they see as being ineffective. Help engineers to learn and share on-the-job.

“Coaching as a driver for learning” was introduced for the plant engineers through the Cement Professionals Development track. One of the strengths of the track is that it is flexible and adaptable to the local needs. The main emphasis of this track is the experiential learning philosophy, which largely encourages learning by doing. The track is in 4 phases, the Exploraid, a 2 week Training-Session (the only phase to take place outside the job) and the Dig-in and Take-off phases. (see graph)



Together with the implementation of this program, it was necessary to ensure that each business unit took real ownership for the program in terms of following up the coaching process, on-the-job learning and adapting the program to suit local conditions. The divisional Learning and Development team, prepared the unit L&D Managers, supported them in launching the program in their units and created a number of tools to support the coaching practice.

## Effect

Since the program was launched in 2000, up to 250 participants have gone through the program, which has involved between 90-95% of the total units in the Cement Division. The end result is that more than 50% of the coaches changed their management style since they started coaching and a lot of coachees feel a lot more autonomy and responsibility in their functions. Heard in a recent survey from the coaches and coachees:

*Coach: "Because I have more frequent contacts with my coachee, I know him better. I see what my coachee needs to develop and can give him step by step bigger tasks. I know what he is able to do and that makes me feel more comfortable in delegating tasks."*

*Coachee: "Coming fresh from university I had no idea of what I was able to do and didn't feel comfortable in doing things on my own. I discovered however my competencies and that I could always find a solution on my own, because my coach was never instructing me what to do. By questioning he let me find solutions myself, that made me more self-confident."*

*Coach: "I develop my coachee, but at the same time he develops me by giving me feedback and telling me his experiences. Together we bring each other up to a higher level."*

77% of the coaches say their coachees were autonomous faster and more than 50% of the coachees feel they were integrated faster into their jobs.

We still encounter difficulties with coaching here and there, because coaching is not easy, it requires great investments of commitment and time, but for 80% of the coaches who are coaching today within the Cement Professionals development Program, it has become **'the way to manage'**.

## Experiential learning 'applied' in Cement Professionals

