

# My Work Observation

## Coeck NV

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(Coeck, n.d., company logo Coeck NV)



(Coeck, n.d., Shipyard)

By Marte Peersman  
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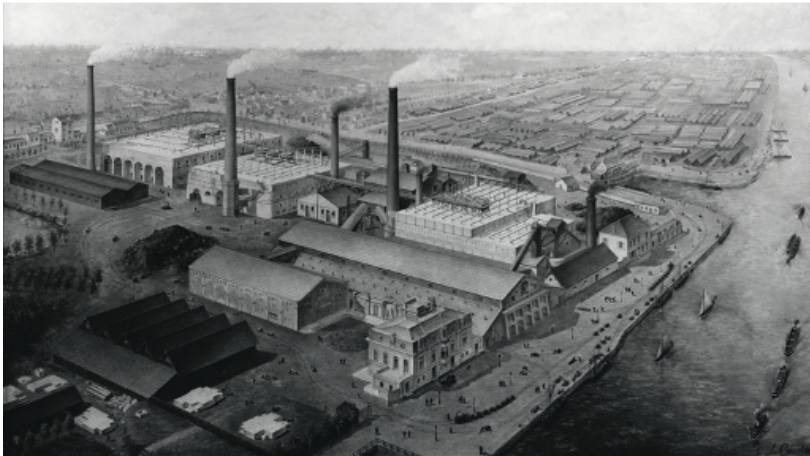
## 2. Introduction

Job shadowing is a great way to learn about the managerial environment and get a taste of management responsibilities. This experience can give you as a student a preview of what lies ahead. As part of my studies, I carried out an 8-hour job shadowing experience with a manager as a part of the project 'My Work Observation'. The manager I chose to observe is Stijn Peersman, a sales manager at Coeck NV, a concrete factory. During the job shadowing, I had the opportunity to interview the manager, and the questions covered subjects including the company's organizational structure and the manager's approach to implementing change and innovation.

In this report, I will share my experience and take you on my journey of my work observation with Stijn Peersman. The report will cover the day's activities, Peersman's career, duties, and work as a sales manager, as well as additional details about Peersmans work environment, and how Peersman and the business manage change and innovation. By using a job shadowing experience as a lens, this report aims to offer a thorough insight into the managerial environment and the experience of management responsibilities.

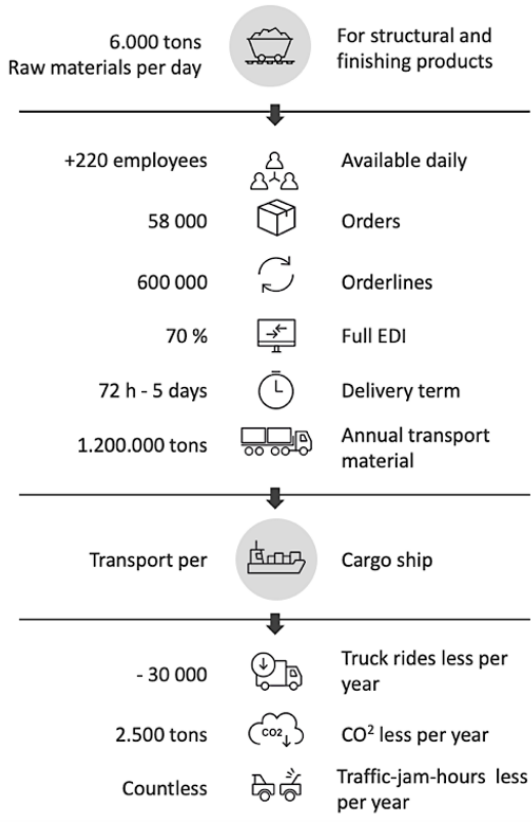
### 3. The Company

Coeck NV is a family-run business established in Niel in 1929, with four generations of experience in manufacturing high-quality concrete products. In addition to producing an extensive range of concrete products, the company distributes various structural and finishing materials, including pavers and tiles for garden, wall, floor, and paving. The company is strategically located on the Rupel and is a logistics partner for transporting large volumes to small logistics units through inland shipping and road transport. Coeck NV has made sustainability a crucial component of its vision, making building and renovation products simple, affordable, and sustainable. The company's sustainability policy is based on six pillars: energy, logistics, materials, innovation, recognition, and local anchoring. With a strong focus on renewable energy resources, Coeck NV has installed solar panels to self-generate 100% of its energy and energy-efficient LED lighting in all production areas, reducing usage by 5% per ton annually. In October 2021, Coeck NV achieved the bronze level Cradle to Cradle Certification, a prestigious and reliable science-based standard for developing and producing goods that improve health and wellbeing. The company aims to receive a silver level accreditation by 2025 (Coeck NV, n.d.).



(Coeck, n.d., former cement factory in 1880)

3.1 Coeck NV In Numbers



(Coeck NV, n.d.)

## 4. The Manager

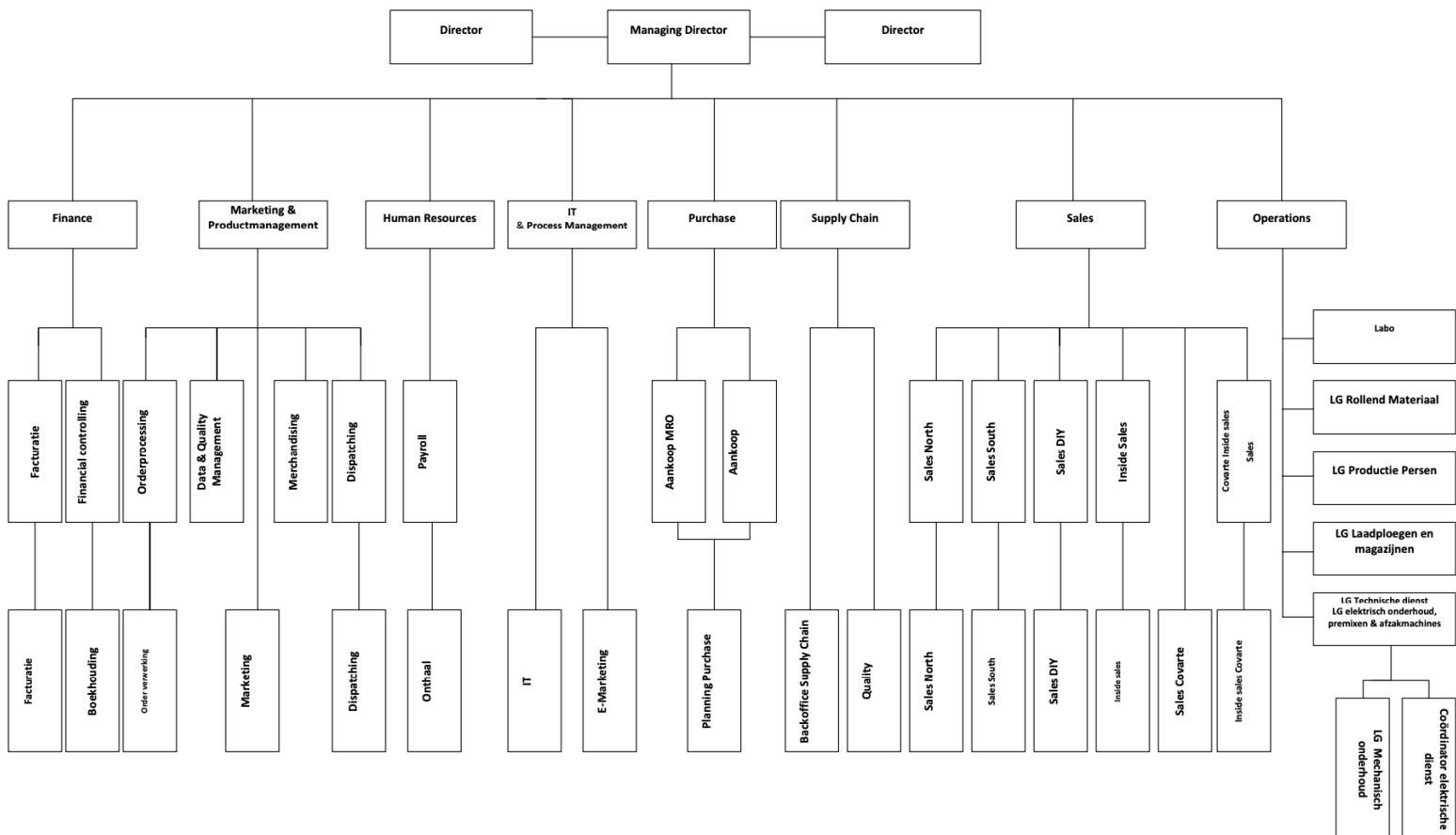
Stijn Peersman is a Business Management and Marketing graduate from the Mercator Hogeschool of Ghent who started his career as a Sales Representative at Coeck NV. He has worked his way up to become a Zone Manager of Flanders and later Sales Manager North, overseeing the sales operations in Flanders, the Netherlands, and Germany. In his current role, Peersman is responsible for managing sales representatives and ensuring they meet the sales targets set by the Commercial Director (Peersman, 2023).

Peersman has expressed his ambition to become the commercial final responsible within one of the production divisions at Coeck. He hopes to manage commercial operations, business development, and product management within that division. His dedication and skills have been an asset to Coeck, and it is expected that he will continue to contribute to the company's success (Peersman, 2023).



(LinkedIn, n.d., Stijn Peersman)

## 5. Organogram



## 6. Log with activities of the day

### 6.1 Meeting With the Sales Representatives

**Date:** 9th of February 2024

**Time:** 8:30 am

**Medium:** in-person

**Participants:**

- Stijn Peersman (meeting leader, Sales Manager North)
- Wim Lapeire (Sales Representative for the region of East Flanders)
- Kim Bruyndonckx (Sales Representative for the regions Flemish Brabant, Limburg and Antwerp)
- Marte Peersman (International Business Management Student at Artevelde University of Applied Sciences)

Before the meeting started, attendees engaged in open and informal communication while waiting for all the representatives to arrive. Stijn Peersman began the meeting with a short introduction and informed the representatives about my presence. He then guided, informed, and mentored the representatives through a PowerPoint presentation that he had prepared.

The meeting covered a variety of topics, including:

- Difficulties within the administration, specifically with the filling in of the agenda
- Client list, indicating potential clients based on numbers and their companies' performance
- Setting deadlines and goals for March, including defining priorities and task division
- Personal opportunity for one representative to observe a client's operations
- Transfer of clients between representatives due to Peersman's promotion and increased international work

During the meeting, Peersman emphasized the importance of timely filling in the agenda and being clear and concise. Attendees took notes on important points, both in writing and on the computer. Throughout the meeting, there was a sense of support and encouragement among all attendees as team members shared their challenges with clients. When the final topic of the meeting was introduced, Stijn Peersman drew upon his own experiences as a former representative to empathize with his co-workers and offer valuable insights. His mentoring and interpersonal skills were on display, leaving a positive impression.

One topic that particularly caught everyone's attention during the meeting was the discussion on new imports from India. Peersman provided an overview of the prices and colors of the new tiles and the potential clients who might be interested in purchasing them. The representatives also brainstormed on effective strategies for clients to make the purchase. With the principle of "first ordered, first served" in mind, the representatives discussed how to encourage their clients to seize the opportunity to purchase the leftover stock. Another important point discussed during the meeting was the issue of stock management. Due to a deflation in prices, the representatives faced the challenging task of selling off the leftover stock in the warehouse.

Overall, the meeting was highly productive, with attendees engaging in open and informal communication and Peersman's mentoring and interpersonal skills shining through. The atmosphere was supportive and collaborative, making it a successful gathering for all involved.

## 6.2 Individual Meeting With a Merchandising Manager

**Date:** 9th of February 2024

**Time:** 1 pm – 2 pm

**Medium:** in-person

**Participants:**

- Stijn Peersman (meeting leader, Sales Manager North)
- Cindy Avonts (Merchandising Manager)
- Marte Peersman (International Business Management Student at Artevelde University of Applied Sciences)

The primary topic discussed was about changes regarding the product assortments. The discussion included the POS (Point of Sale) material, which is the material presented in showrooms to potential clients. They talked about changes in labels and the settings on different locations.

The primary objective was to ensure expositions are in good condition and up to date with the company's new assortment, as some products are casted out. According to pictures taken by employees, Avonts and Peersman decided on which stones should be replaced or added on the exposition stands in different locations. Stones are taken out and replaced when there is damage to the stone or the product has been casted out. During the meeting, it was noticed that there was an unequal turn-taking in communication. Peersman took the lead while Avonts noted down the changes that had to be made. Clarity was very important, and questions were being asked to avoid ambiguity. In addition, I noticed that Stijn Peersman had an open body language and maintained eye contact.

As a result of the transition to a newer system, the participants collaborated and actively listened to one another to identify effective solutions for emerging issues. They shared their opinions, acknowledged diverse perspectives, and noted what could realistically be achieved on paper. The meeting demonstrated a collaborative effort in finding solutions and maintaining clarity.



## 6.3 Individual Meeting with Sales Representative for East Flanders

**Date:** 9th of February 2023

**Time:** 2 pm - 3:30 pm

**Medium:** in-person

**Participants:**

- Stijn Peersman (meeting leader, Sales Manager North)
- Wim Lapeire (Sales Representative for the region of East Flanders)
- Marte Peersman (International Business Management Student at Artevelde University of Applied Sciences)

**Discussed topics:**

- Individual action points
- Opportunities with clients in assigned region of East-Flanders

The purpose of the meeting was to define the individual action points and areas of improvement for Wim Lapeire in addition to identifying client opportunities for Lapeire's assigned region of West-Flanders. Data analysis enabled Peersman to identify the companies that need more attention and investment of time.

The meeting began by addressing any questions that Lapeire may have had, as the previous meeting had ended a few minutes early. Feedback was given during the meeting, and the representative was asked about his thoughts on the feedback, as well as his personal opinions on areas where he could improve and whether Peersman or Coeck NV could provide any support. Another topic discussed during the meeting was the complaints from YouBuild, a building materials supplier in Beveren. The concern was that the business owners did not have enough knowledge about the authorities in Coeck. To address this issue, Peersman suggested organizing a dinner with the company owners and visiting their business.

Regardless of the anticipated duration, the meeting continued until all the topics on the agenda were discussed. Expectations were communicated, and individual goals were defined. There was a 7% increase in sales in East-Flanders, and the goal is to improve upon that figure.

## 6.4 Individual Meeting With Sales Representative of Flemish Brabant, Limburg and Antwerp

**Date:** 9th of February 2024

**Time:** 4pm - 5:30 pm

**Medium:** in-person

**Participants:**

- Stijn Peersman (meeting leader, Sales Manager North)
- Kim Bruyndonckx (Sales Representative for the regions Flemish Brabant, Limburg and Antwerp)
- Marte Peersman (International Business Management Student at Artevelde University of Applied Sciences)

**Discussed topics:**

- Individual action points
- Opportunities with clients in assigned regions
- Appraisal

The meeting was initiated by Peersman, who recognized Bruyndonckx's accomplishments over the previous year, while also stressing the need to address any potential negative concerns. Bruyndonckx was praised for the progress he had made, and his talkative and spontaneous nature was considered to be a valuable skill in his role as a sales representative. Peersman then shifted the focus of the meeting towards the Sales Representatives action points and he identified the growth potential of clients within his assigned regions. The growth potential of the clients was assessed based on their revenue and purchase habits.

During the meeting, there was a discussion about the products that Bruyndonckx's most significant clients were asking for and the areas that they should invest more focus on to meet customer needs. Peersman probed Bruyndonckx about his emotions and concerns with respect to taking on new clients under his purview. As the role involves shouldering significant responsibilities, it was essential to gauge Bruyndonckx's sentiments to mitigate any potential burnout or job-related stress. Peersman took the time to understand Bruyndonckx's perspectives on the matter to ensure that his workload was manageable and aligned with his strengths.

## 7. Written Report

Effective sales management is essential for any company's success in the fast-paced, fiercely competitive commercial environment of today. As such, gaining insights from experienced sales managers is a valuable asset for aspiring sales professionals. In this report, I will present my findings of an interview with Stijn Peersman. Through this interview, I aimed to gain a deeper understanding of Mr. Peersman's position, his approach to sales management, and the work environment in which he operates.

### **Peersman's Career Development**

During higher education, Stijn Peersman studied Business Management at Mercator College in Ghent, where he specialized in Marketing Management. As a young lad, he was always interested in the commercial aspects of running a business, defining growth opportunities and new markets making this education suitable (Peersman, 2023).

*"My insights in marketing help me in obtaining successful sales results. They make it easier to work with the marketing department and to better understand the marketing 'abbacadabra'."*

- Stijn Peersman

After he successfully finished his studies in Ghent, he soon started working for Trelleborg Industrial Company in Birmingham, where he gained his first international experience. He worked for Trelleborg Industrial Company for more than 2 years until he moved back to Belgium (Peersman, 2023). Following his international experience in Birmingham, Stijn Peersman spent eight years as a sales representative for Stone NV, a Belgian building material company with sales activities spanning across Europe. During this time, he was responsible for managing the sales of the German, Swiss, and Austrian markets (Peersman, 2023). For the past 15 years, Mr. Peersman has been working at Coeck Beton NV, a family-owned Belgian company specializing in the production of concrete construction materials. He began his tenure at Coeck Beton NV as a sales representative for East-Flanders and Antwerp, gradually expanding his sales regions to include Flemish Brabant and Limburg. Since 2014, Mr. Peersman has held the position of Sales Manager for Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands. In the past year, he took on the role of Sales Manager for the German market, further expanding his responsibilities, and demonstrating his expertise in the field of sales management (Peersman, 2023).

## **The Work of a Sales Manager**

According to Mr. Peersman's insights gained from our interview (Peersman, 2023), a sales manager's daily work involves staying in contact with the sales team through phone calls or online meetings. Additionally, he leads a weekly sales meeting at the beginning of the week with the entire team, followed by one-on-one meetings with the sales representatives, during which I obtained valuable insights. Moreover, Mr. Peersman stated (Peersman, 2023) that he begins each day with a brief meeting alongside the commercial director to discuss ongoing projects and urgent matters. These urgent matters may include targets, product launches, and other pressing issues. Just like any job, managers have responsibilities. For Peersman, those responsibilities mainly include obtaining the commercial targets. Peersman (2023) added that it was not only of significant importance to obtain the sales targets, but also successfully launch new products and ensure the successful development of sales activities and Coeck NV's positioning in new markets.

When questioning further, Peersman (2023) highlighted the importance of teamwork and it comes with benefits and challenges. I asked him about the challenges he has encountered during his career as a sales manager and how he handled them. As a former sales representative, Peersman experienced challenges when transitioning to a sales management role. Specifically, he found it difficult to let go of his former clients and he would tend to micromanage their replacement. However, he learned to respect that there are different ways of working and that other approaches can also be successful (Peersman, 2023). During the interview with the sales manager (Peersman, 2023), he discussed his approach to enhancing team effectiveness. He stressed the importance of maintaining close communication with sales representatives, which allows him to provide guidance and make adjustments to their approach as needed. The sales manager also highlighted the value of regular check-ins with team members to review progress and share best practices. This involves sharing results and facilitating opportunities for sales representatives to listen to one another and discuss how they handle various challenges and difficulties. By fostering an open and collaborative team environment, the sales manager believes that team effectiveness can be significantly improved.

During the interview, Peersman (2023) acknowledged that while there are certainly interesting aspects of being a sales manager, there are also several challenges that come with the position. One of the primary difficulties is maintaining a clear overview of all the tasks and responsibilities for which he is responsible, as well as effectively managing time. Peersman emphasized that this can be particularly challenging given the fast-paced nature of sales, and the need to juggle multiple priorities simultaneously. Peersman (2023) employs effective time management techniques by scheduling his meetings well in advance and limiting their number, recognizing that meetings can sometimes take longer than anticipated and negatively impact productivity. Additionally, Peersman designates specific time blocks to focus on individual tasks, allowing him to work uninterrupted. While he values his flexibility, Peersman acknowledges the need for stricter boundaries around time when people can contact him. As he stated in the interview, implementing these boundaries can foster a more efficient and concentrated work environment (Peersman, 2023).

## **The work environment**

During the interview with Peersman (2023), we delved into the internal and external business environment of Coeck NV, identifying various factors that affect the organization. These included external uncontrollable factors such as changing markets, as well as internal forces like strategic reorientation or stock issues. Peersman emphasized that the sales department is always on high alert, acting as the company's eyes and ears in the market, and should promptly respond to any shifts. Peersman also noted the importance of effectively communicating any internal changes, such as production or stock issues, to clients in a positive and transparent manner (Peersman, 2023). Staying competitive on the market requires active innovation. Annually, Coeck NV has 3 product development meetings. By taking the time to brainstorm, the production manager, marketing manager, one of the family business owners and the production manager responsible for the communication about the characteristics of the new products, it's prices and qualities, they hope to successfully launch 3 up to 5 new products to bring on the market each year. Additionally, Coeck NV makes large investments in machines, buildings, personnel to approach markets, and new factories to become active suppliers in new markets (Peersman, 2023).

To analyze the organizational structure of a company, it is crucial to understand how different parts of the organization collaborate to achieve common goals. The structure of a company refers to its organization and how its different departments interact with each other. One aspect of organizational structure is the presence of hierarchical management levels. According to Peersman (Peersman, 2023), Coeck's organizational structure leans more towards a strong hierarchical structure because of multiple reasons. First, there is a rather clear chain of command and roles and responsibilities are well defined which avoids ambiguity and ensures that tasks are carried out efficiently. Second, Coeck NV is a family owned and directed business, leading to a centralized decision making. Lastly, Peersman (2023) describes the specialization within the business rather high, both in task and roles, leading to greater efficiency and effectiveness as employees can focus on their area of expertise.

Moving forward, Peersman identifies Coeck NV's structure rather as a mixture between organic and mechanistic and I can follow his reasoning as to why. Coeck NV's organizational structure can be seen as mechanistic because, like it is a family run company and decision-making happens centralized. Overall, there is a high specialization and employees have fixed duties. There are different representatives, specialized in certain products. However, Coeck can partially be seen as organic due to the fact there are few stern rules and the communication happens rather informal on the work floor. Peersman (2023) further explains that he does not call his superiors by "Mr" or "Ms" but addresses them using a first name basis. Finally there is a healthy amount of control and you do not have to justify everything. Overall, Coeck's structure is rather mechanistic according to the organizational design principles and the presence of hierarchical management levels.

Something I noticed was the strong departmentalization within the company and this remark was confirmed in the interview (Peersman, 2023). I noticed it first when attending a company tour at the beginning of the first semester. The departmentalization at Coeck is based on functions. They have an HR department, sales department, accounting department, etc. It is partially based on the products developed. Some departments focus on premix, covarte (measure work), and other products developed by Coeck.

Naturally, some of today's organizational design challenges are building an organization where people can continuously learn. I asked Peersman about how he tries to contribute to the creation of a learning organization and what the company itself does to achieve this. Peersman (2023) says he actively contributes to creating a learning organization by sharing knowledge and information with his team to the extent possible. Moreover, he ensures that the results of their collective efforts are made visible, to motivate his team and fine-tune or regulate actions where needed. He also organizes activities for them during or after work where they can interact with each other in various settings, facilitating opportunities for decompressing from work and actively listening to one another (Peersman, 2023).

On the other hand, Coeck plans training for its employees such as training about leadership and positive communication. This training was spread over several days and the employees learned how to approach and prepare for evaluation sessions. During this year, the sales representatives and managers had trainings about leadership, remote leadership (how to work with online tools, e.g. during a pandemic), Excel training and master classes for sales. The purpose of those training sessions is to strengthen the skills of sales representatives and interaction with each other. They demonstrate the company's commitment to investing in its employees' professional development and growth (Peersman, 2023).

## Managing Change

To gain a deeper insight in how a business manages change, I interviewed Peersman about managing change and innovation and the decision-making process they go through, substantiated with some recent examples. Peersman (2023), talked about a new ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) system which the company installed at the start of the year. In the first phase of the process, top executives had to determine the necessity of a new system. After careful consideration, the company started defining its options and testing the different systems. The top executives will then decide from a series of systems, taking costs and expectations in mind. In the second phase, the company indicated a person per department that would be immediately trained in the new system so that they already gain a good understanding of the new system and new way of working. This person is called the key user. The key users are responsible for preparing the new system implementation alongside executives. In the last phase, further training of employees takes place. It is the task of the key users to support other employees in working with the new system because they are already familiar with the new implementation. To smoothen the transaction, Coeck ran the new system in sync with the old system (Peersman, 2023).

Mr Peersman (2023), included the start-up from Covarte as a second example. Cavarte is a department/activity focused on providing 100 % customized products while all other production activities of the company are based on mass production. Peersman (2023), says that the keys to this successful launch were the willingness and capabilities of employees to do this new kind of production. An important aspect that comes into play here is measuring the success of changes brought to the organization. To shine some light on how managers evaluate the impact on change, I questioned Peersman about his approach. Peersman (2023) replied, saying he evaluates the new situation on a regular basis which enables him to identify serious deviations and take timely measures.

When discussing change, it's important to note that it's not just limited to organizational changes in structure. Individuals themselves can undergo transformations in their attitudes, expectations, perceptions, and behaviors, as Peersman himself experienced. Recently, Peersman had to intervene in the work habits of one of his sales representatives who was overworking and not adhering to established norms. Although the Sales Representative was unaware of the situation they had gotten themselves into, they recognized the issue once it was brought to their attention. Peersman took action as a responsible manager and worked with the HR department to develop a plan to monitor the colleague's progress and ensure that clear boundaries were established to prevent burnout (Peersman, 2023).

One of the most prevalent challenges that companies encounter at some point in their operations is resistance to change. While this may pose a hurdle to progress, there are several promising techniques that managers can employ to minimize this resistance among employees. According to Peersman's interview (2023), one critical step that managers can take is to motivate their employees by showing them that they believe in the proposed changes. Effective communication and discussing the change process transparently are also essential in addressing the employees' concerns. Furthermore, it is possible to instill a sense of ownership among your team members by paying attention to their worries and involving them in the change process as a team. This strategy can consequently result in greater openness and receptivity toward change because employees may feel more interested in the success of the change and they are more likely to see the value in change when they feel that their opinions are being heard and taken into consideration. By taking these measures into account, managers can reduce resistance to change, resulting in a smoother and more successful transition for the organization (Peersman, 2023).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, being a sales manager at Coeck NV involves leading and managing a sales team to successfully achieve sales targets, launching new products, and developing sales activities in new markets. The role also entails overcoming challenges such as maintaining a clear overview of responsibilities and effectively managing time. To enhance team effectiveness, it is crucial to employ effective time management techniques, open communication, and promote a collaborative team environment. In addition, promoting a learning organization is crucial, and managers can contribute to this by sharing knowledge, organizing activities for employees to decompress from work, and fostering an environment where employees can voice their opinions and share instructive experiences.

Coeck NV's organizational structure is characterized by strong departmentalization, with specialized departments for various functions, including HR, sales, accounting, and product development. The company also has a mechanistic structure, with centralized decision-making, a clear chain of command, fixed duties, and a strong hierarchical structure.

To manage resistance to change, motivating employees is crucial, and this can be achieved by showing belief in proposed changes, effective communication, and involving employees in the change process. Adequate training and support are also necessary to help employees adjust to new processes and systems. By employing these techniques, managers can reduce resistance to change, resulting in a smoother and more successful transition for the organization. Overall, a sales manager at Coeck NV must employ effective management strategies, foster a learning organization, and manage resistance to change to ensure the company's success.



## 8. Reflection on My Work Observation

### 8.1 New Insights

As I observed a sales manager in action, I realized that being a manager goes paired with different roles such as being a leader, monitor, mentor, listener and setting an exemplary example for your employees. I also learned that being a manager requires a diverse set of skills. It is important to be considerate and show empathy towards your employees feelings, while not losing focus of the sales target and ensuring your team achieves the targets set by the sales director. Moreover, you are a leader, and it is important to lead by example so that you can motivate your employees to work with the same effort towards a common goal.

In addition to leading the team, a manager has many other responsibilities, including setting up meetings, mitigating conflicts and risks, and taking on the role of a mentor. A good manager guides their employees, recognizes their strengths, addresses their weaknesses, and helps them in developing their professional skills. I found it admirable how the sales manager I observed, Stijn Peersman, shared his past experiences to help his employees navigate challenges. He placed himself in their shoes to gain a better understanding and show empathy towards their problems, worries, or concerns. However, I also learned that this can be a conflicting feeling for a manager because every employee can have a different way of working, and what worked for them in the past may not work for others. Nonetheless, according to Peersman, what ultimately matters is whether the team reaches their goals.

Observing Peersman's client management techniques was insightful. He built relationships with clients by organizing dinners or company tours, and he identified client needs based on their communicated expectations or purchase patterns. I also saw how he managed his time effectively by following a schedule and having an agenda with discussion points for meetings. This helped him guide meetings efficiently and not miss any potential information. Observing a sales manager can give you an understanding of how they manage their sales team. I saw how Peersman motivated his team and incentivized team members, set sales targets, and tracked progress and performance based on data and expectations set by the directors.

Overall, I learned that being a manager is a hard working job that involves wearing many hats and having a diverse set of skills. Good communication, leadership, mentorship, and time management skills are essential for any manager to be successful.

## 8.2 The Most and Least Enjoyable Part of the Experience

Overall, I found the experience of shadowing my father, Stijn Peersman, in his work environment to be a fulfilling and insightful opportunity. As a manager, he wears many hats and it was eye-opening to see firsthand the diverse set of skills and responsibilities that are required in his role. One of the most enjoyable parts of the experience was attending the initial meeting with the sales representatives from West Flanders and the regions of Flemish Brabant, Limburg, and Antwerp. This meeting provided a deep dive into the world of a sales manager, with discussions focused on key performance metrics, growth opportunities, targets, and deadlines for achieving objectives.

While the experience overall was positive, there were certain aspects that were less enjoyable. In particular, the second meeting was less informative and lacked useful insights. Furthermore, the topics covered seemed to be more aligned with merchandising than the specific responsibilities of a sales manager. By virtue of this experience, I gained a better understanding of the challenges and rewards of being a manager, and to have witnessed firsthand the dedication and hard work required to succeed in this role. Besides, since, it has been a long-held aspiration of mine to observe my father, Stijn Peersman, in his professional setting. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to fulfill this lifelong ambition.

## 8.3 A Future Job?

My work observation made me realize that becoming a sales manager would not be my first choice. I realized that my interests are more directed to marketing and managing the operations of a business. As a marketing professional, I would have the opportunity to leverage my creativity and strategic thinking to develop effective marketing campaigns that align with the company's objectives. Similarly, as an operations manager, I would be responsible for overseeing the daily activities of a business, ensuring that everything runs smoothly and efficiently, which lies within my interests as well. While I have deep respect for sales managers and their role in driving revenue growth, I have come to realize that my interests and strengths lie in other areas of business. This experience has allowed me to narrow down my career aspirations and has given me a clearer understanding of the type of work I hope to pursue in the future.

## 8.4 Link with IBM Learning Outcomes

### 8.4.1 Management Skills

The ability to effectively manage a team is crucial for a sales manager, as they are accountable for directing and guiding a group of sales representatives towards achieving their sales targets. To accomplish this, sales managers must possess skills in communication, delegation, and feedback provision. Furthermore, they must possess exceptional organizational and time management abilities to effectively manage their team's workload and ensure that sales goals are met. In addition to team leadership, sales managers are also responsible for managing client relationships, monitoring market trends, analyzing data, and creating sales strategies.. Without these management skills, sales managers may find it challenging to motivate their team, establish strong relationships with clients, and make informed data-driven decisions. In the end, it is crucial for sales managers to possess effective management skills to guarantee their team's success and the company's growth.

### 8.4.2 Setting Strategic Goals

Developing clear strategic goals is important for a sales manager and any other manager as it provides direction for the sales team which can help increase motivation and lead to a higher level of performance. Establishing team goals might also lead to an increased sense of commitment among the team members. Another benefit of setting goals is that it allows sales managers to measure the team's performance and track progress towards specific targets. In case of any deviations, the sales manager can quickly react and adjust where needed. Furthermore, setting goals provides a basis for planning and prioritizing sales activities. By clearly defining what needs to be achieved, sales managers can allocate resources effectively, focusing on the most important tasks and activities that will help the team to achieve their goals.

### 8.4.3 An Inquisitive and Critical Attitude

Developing a critical mindset is a valuable skill for a sales manager as it allows them to identify potential problems or challenges, and develop effective solutions. Critical thinking enables them to analyze and question processes and procedures, improve efficiency and make better decisions by considering all available information before making a choice. Additionally, a critical mindset helps managers to gain a deeper understanding of issues and challenges within the workplace, which can lead to more effective problem-solving and decision-making.

Inquisitiveness is another important skill for managers. Inquisitiveness includes being curious and seeking out new information about the industry. By following up on industry trends, sales managers can ensure the competitiveness of the company and adapt to changes in their industry. Encouraging inquisitiveness among employees fosters a culture of continuous learning. Ultimately, developing a critical mindset and fostering a sense of inquisitiveness can help managers to become more effective leaders and drive growth and innovation within their organizations.

#### 8.4.4 Enterprise Accuracy, Problem-Solving and Innovation

Sales managers need to ensure that sales data is accurate and up-to-date, so that they can make informed decisions. Enterprise accuracy is important for them to develop the proper strategies and effective sales activities. Besides, accurate forecasting is essential for sales managers to plan and allocate resources. When potential problems or challenges are identified, problem solving skills are important for sales managers to create solutions to overcome those difficulties. Furthermore, strong, problem-solving skills can help sales managers adapt to changes in the market, and to develop new sales strategies or approaches to meet customer needs.

Innovation is a crucial skill for sales managers as it enables them to identify new sales opportunities and develop effective strategies that cater to the evolving needs of their customers. Moreover, sales managers with an innovative mindset can develop customized training programs or techniques to help their team members enhance their sales skills, which ultimately helps them stay competitive in the market.

#### 8.4.5 International Focus

Having an international focus and understanding the global market can help sales managers identify new sales opportunities, enter new markets, and develop strategies that appeal to diverse customer segments. Peersman has gained valuable international experience by managing client relationships in several countries including Germany, France, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. He is actively involved in meetings to discuss business deals, and recently he successfully closed an international deal in Dubai. Sales managers with international experience can also effectively navigate the complexities of international sales, such as legal and regulatory requirements, logistics, and cultural differences.

#### 8.4.6 Digital Literacy

Sales managers who are familiar with digital tools can leverage technology to improve sales processes, like sales tracking, and data analysis. Being digitally literate also enables sales managers to keep themselves informed of new technologies and industry trends. Finally, sales managers who possess expertise in using digital communication tools such as email, video conferencing, and social media can effectively communicate with customers and team members, regardless of their geographical location. During my work observation, I noticed that email is a crucial communication tool for managers. Peersman uses Email for communication with various departments, clients, and partners.

#### 8.4.7 Customer orientation and Relation Management

Relationship management skills are important for a sales manager to build strong and long-term relationships with clients and partners. It is also important to maintain the relationships with other stakeholders such as suppliers, clients and employees. Building a large and diverse clientele can lead to new sales opportunities. A strong sense of unity among the company's departments and personnel may translate to a competitive advantage. Additionally, relationship management is an important skill for resolving problems with customers or stakeholders, which leads to increased customer satisfaction and retention.

#### 8.4.8 Collaboration

Having strong collaboration skills is essential for sales teams to perform well and increase productivity. Effective collaboration can boost team morale and engagement, resulting in improved sales performance. Additionally, sales managers often collaborate with various departments within the organization and external partners, like distributors and suppliers. Sales managers may find new sales potential and develop plans that satisfy stakeholders by collaborating. It also fosters communication and knowledge sharing, leading to better decision-making process, problem-solving, and skill development.

#### 8.4.9 Intercultural Sensitivity

Sales managers with intercultural sensitivity skills can effectively navigate cultural differences and communicate with customers from diverse backgrounds. By being interculturally sensitive, sales managers can avoid misunderstandings and a loss of face. Possessing these skills can reduce the risk of damaging relationships with stakeholders, strengthen your relationships by cultivating trust and respect and generate a positive company image. Subsequently, this can lead to improved sales performance and growth.

#### 8.4.10 Self-Direction and Professional Development

I believe that it is advantageous for all individuals, including sales managers, to prioritize self-direction and professional development. Proactive and self-driven sales managers are capable of taking ownership of their tasks and responsibilities. By taking part in professional development programs, employees may take steps to expand their knowledge and abilities by identifying their areas of strength and improvement. When sales managers prioritize their professional growth, they can bring innovative concepts and cutting-edge techniques to their job. Furthermore, self-driven sales managers may act as role models for their staff, encouraging them to take responsibility for their own development and seek out learning opportunities. As a result, the sales team and the company as a whole may develop a culture of continuous learning and growth, raising output and performance levels.

## 8.5 Linking My Personal SWOT Analysis With the Job Competencies of a Sales Manager

I possess several job competencies that fall under my areas of strength, including a strong work ethic, exceptional interpersonal skills, initiative-taking, creative thinking, multilingualism, and leadership skills. I firmly believe that my diligent nature, and skills can benefit any organization. When it comes to the role of a sales manager, my strengths perfectly align with the job's demands. In particular, my interpersonal skills, which include active listening, empathy, and building strong relationships, are essential in establishing and maintaining collaborations with significant stakeholders. Furthermore, my proficiency in multiple languages, including Dutch, French, English, German, and Spanish, is an added advantage in the context of global business. The ability to communicate fluently with stakeholders from different regions or countries can be beneficial in establishing and maintaining relationships that can unlock new opportunities for the company's growth. Besides, my interpersonal skills and multilingualism, my leadership skills and motivational abilities could help a sales team in achieving the sales goals set by the sales director.

To improve my employability for a sales manager role, I should address any weaknesses and threats. First, I could start by controlling my stress levels. This is feasible by taking regular breaks and making time to unwind. Second, by understanding how to prioritize tasks, utilizing time management tools, and establishing reasonable deadlines, I may be able to hone my skills in time management. In addition to these action points, I can boost my confidence and motivation by shifting my perspective towards viewing mistakes as valuable learning opportunities and celebrating successes. It's also crucial to take care of myself and avoid overworking to prevent burnout and demotivation. Lastly, pursuing higher education or professional development opportunities can help me enhance my knowledge and skills and make me a more competitive candidate for a sales manager position.

## 8.6 Preparing for a Sales Manager Role: the IBM Program Curriculum

The International Business Management program encompasses a wide range of business-related topics such as marketing, finance, economics, supply chain management, and intercultural communication, which are all essential for comprehending the various aspects of business operations and their relation to global markets. In terms of meeting the needs of a sales manager, I believe the IBM curriculum is well-suited because it offers courses on business strategies and customer relationship management. Additionally, an International Business program can help students develop soft skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and intercultural competence. During the first year of the IBM program, we had a dedicated course in intercultural communication skills, which provided valuable insights for working in an international company. As previously mentioned, intercultural sensitivity is crucial for building strong relationships based on trust and respect with stakeholders such as clients, partners, suppliers, or employees overseas.

Furthermore, the program provides opportunities for internships, case studies, work observation, and other experiential learning opportunities, which allow students to apply theories and concepts learned in the classroom to real-world business scenarios. These opportunities are valuable and enriching experiences that provide International Business Management students insight into the life of management. Overall, I believe an International Business program can equip students with a solid foundation of knowledge and skills that are relevant to a sales manager role.

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## 10. Appendix A. Work Observation Certificate



### Work Observation Certificate 2022-2023

Name manager : Stijn Peersman

confirms that the following student: Marte Peersman

has participated in a Work Observation period of at least 8 hours at :

Name and address company : Betonfabriek Coeck NV

De Luchtvaart 6, 2845 Niel

On the following days

09/02/23 (date) from 08.00 till 18.00 (time)

\_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_ (date) from \_\_\_ till \_\_\_ (time)

\_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_ (date) from \_\_\_ till \_\_\_ (time)

The student has demonstrated a positive attitude during the work observation

YES/NO

(Note down possible comments below)

Date: 10/02/2023

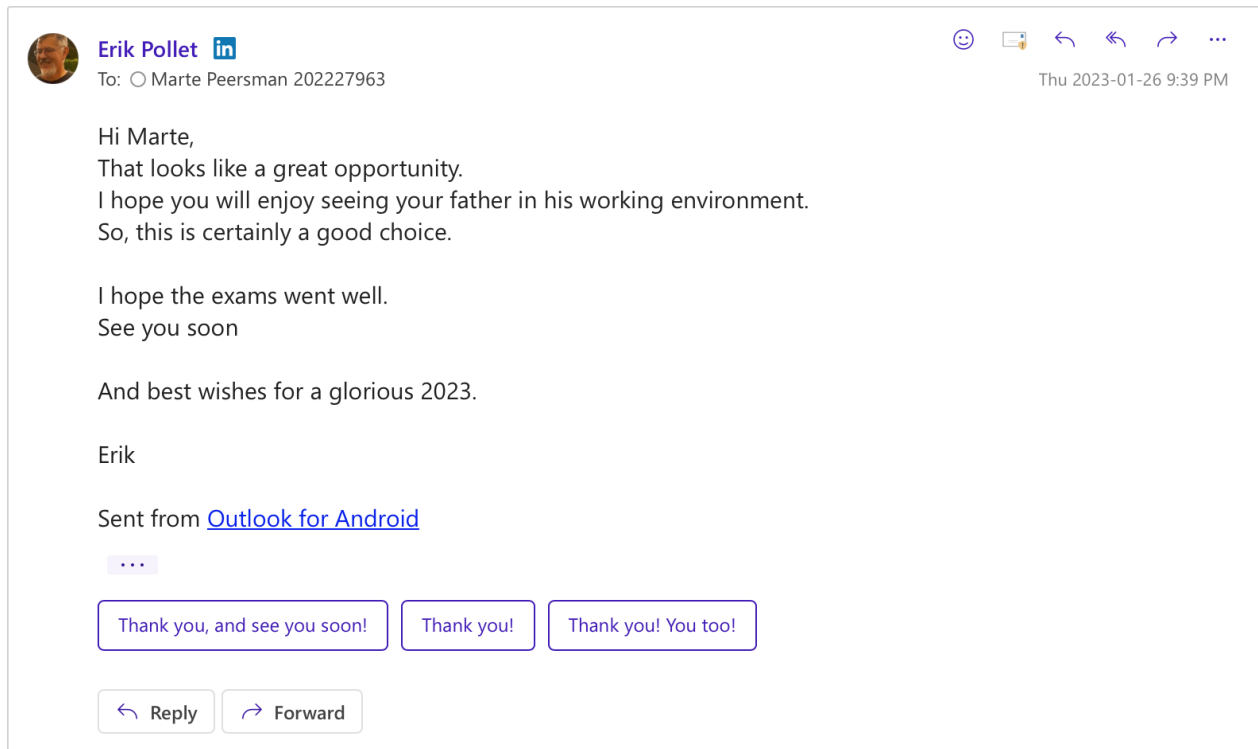
Signature manager :

Remarks :

*Marte was very attentive and showed interest in what was being discussed.  
She was polite and friendly towards the other managers and personnel.  
Marte gave a clear description of the purpose of her internship.*

Add this certificate to the appendix of your Work Observation Report

## 11. Appendix B. Confirmation Email from Study Coach



## 12. Questionnaire Interview With Manager

### 1. What did you study during higher education and why?

*I studied Business Management at Mercator Collage in Gent, where I specialized in Marketing management. I have always been interested in the commercial aspects of running a business, searching for opportunities and new markets. My insights in marketing help me in obtaining successful sales results and makes it easier to work with the marketing department and to better understand the marketing 'abbacadabra'.*

### 2. How did your career develop over the years?

*I finished my studies in Gent successfully and I immediately chose for a first working experience abroad. I worked for the Trelleborg Industrial company in Birmingham for over 2 years. I was responsible for the internal sales and communication with Benelux customers and sales force. When I moved back to Belgium, I worked 8 years for Stone NV, a Belgian based company, with sales activities all over Europe. As sales representative I was responsible for the German, Suisse, and Austrian markets. Over the years I also became more involved with procurement of certain materials. For the last 15 years I have worked for Coeck Beton NV, a family-owned company, specialized in the production of concrete construction materials. I started as a sales representative for East-Flanders and Antwerp. After a couple of years, I expanded my sales region with Flemish Brabant and Limburg. From 2014 till now I'm Sales manager for Flanders (Belgium), the Netherlands and since a year also for the German market.*

### 3. Can you describe the daily activities at your work which you are confronted with?

*Daily I'm in contact with my sales team. Most of the time by phone or in online meetings. Once a week I lead the sales meeting with the entire team, followed by one-on-one meetings with the sales representatives. Every day I start with a brief meeting with my commercial director. To inform him of ongoing projects and to discuss urgent matters (projects, the launch of new products, targets, etc).*

### 4. What are some problem areas in your job as sales manager?

*Keeping a clear overview over all the things for which I am responsible and involved. Time management is certainly an issue. Coping with new experience, being the personal backgrounds of each of my sales representatives.*

### 5. What are your responsibilities as a manager?

*Obtaining the commercial targets. Not only sales targets and budget, but also successfully launching of new products and the development of our activities and position in new markets.*

6. What are some interesting aspects about being a manager?

*Working in a team and together achieving results. Being in constant contact with other departments of the organization.*

7. How do you manage your time efficiently? Do you make a planning, and do you strictly follow that planning or can you be more flexible in your planning and how you manage time?

*Some meetings you plan in advance. I try not to plan too many meetings, because sometimes a meeting takes more time than foreseen. I also plan some time blocks for myself, in which I can work undisturbed. I'm rather flexible, maybe I should be more strict.*

8. Do external forces have a big influence in the company? External factors are uncontrollable alterations in an organization's external business environment. What about internal forces? Internal forces refer to required optimizations of an organization's resources, business strategies and/or operations to ensure continuing business effectiveness and/or efficiency. E.g. strategic reorientation, rebranding, (dis)investments, process automation, change in corporate policies, etc.

*The sales department is always in the highest state of alert. Meaning, we are the eyes and the ears of the company on the market. We must react immediately to changing market situations. But also sudden internal changes such as problems in production or stock disruption, need to be translated in the most positive way to the clients.*

9. Working in teams has a lot of benefits, but also some challenges. Which challenges have you encountered during your career as manager and how did you handle them?

*I used to be one of the sales representatives and I handed over a lot of my clients and I was always looking over the shoulders of the new sales representative. Telling them to do it like this or that, the way I used to do it. I had to learn and respect that another way of working can also be successful.*

10. Does Coeck actively try to innovate to gain a competitive advantage? How does the company try to increase innovation? (Giving employees more freedom to bring ideas forward, etc.)

*We annually have 3 product development meetings. What starts with a brainstorm, ends with the hopefully successful launch of 3 to 5 new products each year. But also large investments have been made by the company. So we became active suppliers in new markets.*

11. Companies can change over time and some employees might be resistant towards changes. What are some techniques that you as a manager or the company uses to reduce this resistance to change?

*Stimulate them, show them that you believe in it. Let them try, listen to their concerns and discuss with them the process and where you stand as a team and individually. Adjust where necessary.*

12. How do you, as a manager, increase the effectiveness of your teams?

*By keeping close contacts, which enables me to adjust the way a sales representative is working. On a regular basis showing them the results of their efforts and let them listen to each other how they cope with certain issues and difficulties.*

13. Some of today's organizational design challenges are building an organization where people can continuously learn. How do you create a learning organization and how do you keep your employees connected? What does Coeck NV do to generate a learning organization?

*I try to share as much information with my team as I can. I show them the results of their efforts and I organize some activities after or during work, moments where we meet and speak to each other in a different setting, to decompress from work and to really listen to each other. The company is offering several training programs to help employees develop their leadership and communication skills. One program focuses on leadership and positive communication, which spans over several days and teaches us how to approach and prepare for evaluation interviews. We also had a program which focused specifically on remote leadership and helps employees learn to work with online tools. During this year we had an Excel training course and a master class in sales.*

14. How does Coeck manage innovation and change? What are some recent examples of changes or innovations that have been implemented at the company?

*We planned the implementation of a new ERP system. To do this, we tested multiple systems before selecting the best system from a range of alternatives. Afterwards, we selected one person from each department to train them into the new system. We call those people the key users. Gradually we started training all employees. The responsibilities of the key users is to help prepare the switch to a new system and support other employees because they are already more familiar and schooled. To ensure a smooth transition, the new system synchronized with the old one for a month.*

*The start-up from Covarte, a department/activity where we produce 100 % customized products. All other production activities of the company are based on mass production. We realized this successful launch with employees who were willing and capable to do this new kind of production.*



15. How do you measure the success of an organizational change? Can you provide an example of how you have evaluated the impact of a change in the past?

*By evaluating the new situation on a regular basis. Listen to remarks and take additional measures where necessary. In my sales team we were asked to add to our product portfolio, ceramic tiles. We soon realized that we did not have enough experience and that our product assortment was insufficient. We recognized the needs and urgencies and made it a success.*

16. Have you ever led a team through a change in technology? How did you ensure the team was prepared for the change, and what was your role in the implementation process?

*Not yet. The only change where my team has been subjected to is the change to a complete ERP system, involving a complete change in, reporting, having access to information and facts/figures. Together with the IT-department we organized training and where I sensed there was an individual need for extra training, I set up extra training or tried self to help my team members.*

17. Can you describe a situation where you had to address a change in people within your organization? What were the challenges you faced and how did you address them? (A change in people refers to changes in employee attitudes, expectations, perceptions, or behaviors.)

*I had to interfere in the way one of my sales representatives was working. He was working too hard for too long and was no longer focused on the key functions of his job. He was not aware of it but recognized the situation he worked himself into. Individually we made clear arrangements and together with the HR department we set-up a follow-up the progression of the colleague.*

18. Is there a strong hierarchical structure or is the structure more horizontal? Is there a strong formalization? (The degree to which jobs within the organization are standardized and the extent to which employee behavior is guided by rules and procedures)

*The organizations' structure leans more towards a strong hierarchical structure. There is a rather clear chain of command and roles and responsibilities are well defined which avoids confusion and ensures that tasks are carried out efficiently. Another reason why Coeck, as a company, is rather hierarchically structured, is because Coeck is a family run business and decisions are made at the top level of the company, among members of the family that are involved in the business. In addition, there is a lot of specialization within the firm. Both in tasks and with employee's roles. It leads to greater efficiency, as employees can focus on their area of expertise.*

19. Based on the organizational design principles, would you classify Coeck's company structure as organic or mechanistic? Please support your answer with relevant examples. For reference, please consult the table below, which outlines the key characteristics of each structure.

*In my opinion, the company is a mixture of the two structures, but the 'mechanistic' organization is more applicable. Since the company is a family-owned company, it is directed/run by the family and everything happens more centralized. Moreover, employees have fixed duties and clear responsibilities. Specialization is also high, there are different representatives, specialized in certain products. However, at my workplace, we have an informal way of communicating. For example, I call my boss by their first name instead of using "Mr." or "Ms." We also don't need to explain everything in detail and there is no strict sense of control.*

20. Can you describe the level of departmentalization at Coeck and how it impacts the day-to-day operations of the company? Are there any particular benefits or drawbacks to this approach?

*The departmentalization is based on functions. We have for example an HR department, sales department, accounting department, etc. It is partially based on the products developed. Some departments focus on premix, covarte (measure work).*