

Expanding without getting fat: managing the Vinci Group

by

■ **Xavier HUILLARD** ■

CEO, Vinci Group

Overview

How does one make a very large company expand without becoming too large? Xavier Huillard thinks that the answer lies in the creation of an 'inverted pyramid' structure whereby emphasis is placed on operational business units in the field, and central management is reduced to a strict minimum. This helps to explain why the Vinci Group structure has been described as a network of 3,000 autonomous SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises): each one is managed by its own entrepreneur and initiatives are taken independently. Nonetheless, this network belongs to a larger organisation. The skill of being the CEO of this sort of 'inverted pyramid' is demonstrated by an ability to reconcile an increasingly high degree of decentralisation with the cohesion of each unit to the culture of a large group. In this situation, it is possible for various entities to multiply exponentially without the structure becoming excessively large or stifling entrepreneurial dynamics.

Report by Sophie Jacolin • Translation by Rachel Marlin

The 'Association des Amis de l'École de Paris du management' organises discussions and distributes the minutes, these are the sole property of their authors. The Association can also distribute the comments arising from these documents.

Seminar organised thanks to the sponsors of the École de Paris:

Algoé¹ • ANRT • Be Angels • Carewan • CEA • Caisse des dépôts et consignations • Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Paris Île-de-France • Conseil régional d'Île-de-France • Danone • EDF • ENGIE • ESCP Europe • FABERNOVEL • Fondation Crédit Coopératif • Fondation Roger Godino • Groupe BPCE • HRA Pharma² • IdVectoR² • La Fabrique de l'Industrie • Mairie de Paris • MINES ParisTech • Ministère de l'Économie, de l'Industrie et du Numérique – DGE • Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication – DEPS • NEOMA Business School • Orange • PricewaterhouseCoopers • PSA Peugeot Citroën • Renault • SNCF • Thales • UIMM • VINCI • Ylios

1. for the Business Life seminar
2. for the Technological Resources and Innovation seminar

In the Vinci Group, I have put into practice a philosophy of organisation and management which has driven me for a long time. This is based on the principles of empowerment, autonomy, transversality and even trust. I believe that this philosophy is successful.

Inverting the pyramid

This philosophy was inspired by a meeting at the end of the 1980s with Jean-Marie Descarpentries and Jan Carlzon who were the directors of CarnaudMetalbox and Scandinavian Airlines respectively. Both of them had conceived and implemented the inverted pyramid principle, focussing on organisations which were both decentralised and part of a larger, cohesive structure.

For twenty-seven years, I have been trying to 'invert my pyramid' and fight against the natural tendency for company headquarters to become more technocratic and to expand. Whenever a new problem emerges, there is a strong temptation to recruit specialists to handle the problem at the head office level because the operational entities are considered incompetent or too busy to deal with it. Often those at headquarters feel guilty about being distant from what is happening in the field, and try to make themselves useful by adding to the number of processes, directives and data reports. These clumsy attempts are often useless and merely dampen the entrepreneurial energy of the teams in the field.

There are three guiding principles to my philosophy: containing the technocratic tendency of central management; developing the autonomy and accountability of employees in the field; and creating the conditions for group cohesion.

Vinci has a turnover of approximately 40 billion Euros with 185,000 employees (of which only 250 work in head office). The Group is present in about one hundred countries. It has more than 3,000 business units which are designed to work autonomously, like SMEs or middle market companies. The size of these entities varies according to the expertise needed to function. They can be relatively small (in sectors such as electrical engineering) or much larger such as Vinci Construction Grands Projets which is working on the New Safe Confinement (or New Shelter) at Chernobyl.

Not surprisingly, consultants regularly advise us to pool our support functions between business units. This is an unproved means of optimisation and rationalisation. I am convinced that the savings made to do this would be negligible compared to the value created if each business unit manager acts as if he were an entrepreneur.

Vinci has shown that it has an impressive ability to identify and to integrate new companies. The company is always making acquisitions with as many as thirty in a good year. This is our most important source of growth. Apart from the purchase of ASF in 2006 for 19 billion Euros, over the past ten years we have acquired Cegelec (electrical engineering), Solétanche (world leader in foundations and ground reinforcement), Entrepouse Contracting (oil and gas activities), Aeroportos de Portugal, Constructora Concreto (construction and property development) in Colombia, Orteng (electrical equipment) in Brazil, Electrix in New Zealand, and J&P Richardson (engineering and maintenance of distribution networks for electricity and water) in Australia, to name a few.

Ever since the Group started operating under the name of Vinci in the summer of 2000, it has acquired hundreds of companies, both big and small. We attract them by explaining that they will be part of a network and not part of a process. This is a strong argument for these companies which, until then, were independent. Our strategy of decentralisation allows us to respect their culture and to preserve their entrepreneurial strengths.

I make the final decision about all the acquisition projects – even the smallest – to see how they fit in with our economic model. If I did not ensure this cohesion, I am sure the Group would fall apart quickly.

The three pillars of cohesiveness

Vinci derives its cohesiveness from three principal elements: its business model, its employee share ownership plan, and its policy of corporate social responsibility.

A business model which stands the test of time

The solidity of our economic project is based above all on the association of professions which have different timescales: Vinci Energies operates in the short-term, Vinci Construction in the medium-term, and Vinci Concessions in the long-term. These professions have cycles of varying lengths, and this is crucial in order to last a long time and to overcome crises. In fact, it is the only way to survive.

At Vinci, we deliberately put professions which are very capitalistic (like concessions) with activities which are not very capitalistic (like building works and construction). These latter activities generate working capital in the short-term which can be reinvested in long-term concessions.

These principles were developed intuitively by Alexandre Giros and Louis Loucheur who in 1899 founded the Société Générale d'Entreprises (SGE), which later became Vinci. Giros' grandson, Bernard Huvelin, was still the managing director of the Group fifteen years ago. This means that for more than a century the company has been family-run and the business model has remained stable.

The employees: the majority shareholders

The Group's employees are by far its largest shareholder, holding collectively 12% of its capital. Of our 185,000 employees, 115,000 own shares. This is a powerful lever to encourage empowerment and commitment.

The Corporate Social Responsibility plan

To last a long time, a company has to assume its social and environmental responsibilities in the best way possible. Corporate Social Responsibility plans are becoming a characteristic feature of our culture. They would remain superficial if they were merely the prerogative of a specialised and centralised management. It is necessary for managers of business units to assimilate them and to make them a lever for economic development.

Vinci Energies: the reference for decentralisation

Vinci Energies, which has a turnover of 10 billion Euros and 65,000 employees (less than 50 of whom work at the company's headquarters), is the division which was the most decentralised. It specialises in electrical engineering and, for example, it designed and implemented automation solutions for Michelin factories throughout the world and is in charge of their maintenance.

A micro-segmented marketing approach

Vinci Energies is made up of 1,600 business units (half of which are in France, and half in about fifty other countries). Each unit has an average turnover of 6 million Euros. A marketing micro-segmentation approach is a response to a simple principle: to understand why something is a success, one must understand the roots of its existence. The most efficient model suggests that each person should 'dig deep' to reach the roots and to make sure that all possibilities are exhausted.

This micro-segmentation also guarantees that no business unit infringes on the territory of another. This segmentation is so precise that, for example, one of our companies in Nantes specialises in industrial information technology aimed at manufacturers of pet food.

Vinci Energies is the result of the consolidation of thousands of acquisitions. When this division reaches a significant size in France and Germany, we think we will be ready to continue its expansion on a global scale. Growth will be fuelled by potential candidates who will be attracted by our horizontal organisation operating in a network which guarantees to respect each new acquisition's culture, specificity and managerial dynamics.

A shared strategic plan throughout the hierarchy

Every year, in October, all the Vinci Energies business units launch the 'shared strategic plan' which is very well-defined. Each management micro-team has to think about its project (such as its marketing position, possible diversifications, and so on) and assess its consequences in terms of human resources, sales and marketing activities, not forgetting the budget. At Vinci, drafting the annual budget is merely a by-product of an operational study carried out at the local level in each of the units. The figures merely illustrate the implemented project, and it is the project which is the most important factor.

Once the project is established, the business unit presents it in the form of a presentation to the director in charge of the unit who is also head of about twelve other business units. This project becomes more and more refined (after a fair amount of going backwards and forwards) and at the end of the year, it is finished. It is then presented to the employees. This prevents management from devising a plan which is too detached from what is happening in the field.

This organisational, marketing, managerial and sales philosophy is incorporated in a concept which is part of our in-house ERP software and is called Quartz. Before we buy a new company, we show Quartz to the company: if the new company considers that its software is better than ours, then we know that the acquisition and integration of our two companies will not be successful. Quartz is the framework which explains the success of Vinci Energies and guarantees its cohesiveness.

In such conditions, there are no limits to development. A wide range of companies throughout the world could easily find their place with Vinci Energies. It is possible that in the next few years this division could double in size, due to acquisitions, without its processes being complicated or weighed down. Additional links would simply be added to the network.

The South Europe-Atlantic railway line

In 2011, Vinci won the 'contract of the century', the South Europe-Atlantic high-speed railway line which will extend the current Paris-Bordeaux TGV line, and cut the journey time down to two hours. This project represents 8 billion Euros in concession, 6 billion Euros of which is for the building works, an unheard-of amount for Vinci. The work will take a total of six years and should be completed, turn-key, a few weeks ahead of schedule on July 2nd, 2017. The Group was awarded the entire contract including the land acquisitions, negotiations with those closely concerned (such as elected politicians, farmers, associations for the protection of the environment, local authorities, and so on), earthmoving works, the installation of the railway lines and traffic signals, and so on.

When we signed this contract, I thought that I would be spending the next six years working under pressure from deputies, ministers and other officials who preferred to deal with me, the CEO of the Group, rather than my representatives in the field because they thought it would be more efficient that way. I had visions of their requests for noise-reducing walls, areas to protect wildlife and trees, and so on. To my surprise, I only received two telephone calls. We organised ourselves so that all the problems, difficulties or complaints were handled by consulting those involved most closely in the field. This ability to handle matters in the field is a very important advantage for us at a time when our professions put us in contact with an increasing number of people who legitimately think that they have to give us their point of view about our land use development projects.

Letting the 'wild grass' grow

In a few years, Vinci has become the fifth largest airport management company in the world. I have no part whatsoever in this success, none more so than the bridge which straddles the straits of Corinth. These successes are the result of initiatives taken entirely by employees.

The new airport adventure

After the merger of SGE and GTM in 2000, Vinci inherited two small Cambodian airports which GTM had as concessions. I was tempted to sell them but one of my colleagues, Nicolas Notebaert, dissuaded me. He said he would look after them, and he did so successfully. When he returned from this successful operation in Cambodia, he told me he wanted Vinci to develop an airport activity in France. I told him that I thought that the market was saturated. The Aéroports de Paris was clearly the leader in the Île-de-France region, and the regional infrastructure was managed by the chambers of commerce. However, Nicolas Notebaert still thought that there was a way in which we could develop less important airports like Grenoble, Chambéry, Clermont-Ferrand, Rennes and Quimper. I let him get on with it, and the success has been never-ending. First of all, we took over Nantes airport, and then we won a concession lasting fifty years for all the Portuguese airports. We also have Santiago airport in Chile (with the Aéroports de Paris, 8% of the capital of which we acquired in the meantime), Osaka's two airports (one of which has 25 million passengers every year), six in the Dominican Republic, and finally Lyon airport in the summer of 2016. Today we manage 37 airport platforms where 135 million passengers use every year.

This activity exists due to the motivation of one colleague. My sole merit was that I provided him with the conditions which helped him to demonstrate his enthusiasm. In other words, I let 'wild grass' grow. I think that each of our employees has the duty to try new things and experiment. The Group must let this 'wild grass' grow and take cuttings from those which yield flowers and cut those which wither too fast.

The Rio-Antirrio bridge: an Olympic success

One of our engineers, Jean-Paul Teyssandier is a Graecophile and showed that by mobilising the most modern technology, it was possible to build a bridge over the straits of Corinth despite the earthquake-prone nature of the region, tectonic movements which have progressively separated the two banks, and the presence of horizontal lightning. This was his 'wild grass'! We let him do what he wanted, but he had to convince the Greek authorities. Needless to say, they laughed at him: if such work were possible, it would have already taken place a long time ago. He devised a financial plan which allowed us to finance the work by concession, providing that European funds contributed in part to the investment. His argument was quite attractive to the Greek government. Vinci won the call for tender and Jean-Paul Teyssandier was in charge of the construction of the bridge. He even managed to finish it in time for the Olympic Flame to cross the bridge for the 2004 Olympic Games. Our engineer finished his career with a burning torch in his hand and a construction which he had thought up in his head. What better illustration of the beauty of our profession?

Since then, this bridge has been hit by horizontal lightning which caused two guy wires to break. Importantly, it has survived the economic crisis which started in Greece in 2008, as have the two motorway concessions which we have in the country. This goes to show that the sturdiness of concessions is robust.

With such an organisation, the number of growth perspectives for Vinci are unlimited. Having deliberately decided to decentralise and to create a network, Vinci can grow without becoming overdistended or suffocating entrepreneurial energy with useless processes.

Discussion



Reasonable expansion

Question: *Even though you can see no limits to Vinci's growth, you sold your car park activities and you no longer own water distribution concessions. How did you make these choices?*

Xavier Huillard: There are French companies which are already world leaders in the water distribution industry. With regard to our concessions, Vinci could only be in the second tier, and we do not want to be in that position. However, we are present in other segments of the water value chain, including the conception and construction of water treatment plants, engineering, installation, and the maintenance of water and sanitation networks.

As for our car park activities which require a great deal of investment, they were not compatible with our vision to develop other more money-rich sectors such as airports and motorways. We thought that it was better to let go of one branch in order to concentrate our financial energy on the other two.

Q.: *Do you intend to develop your activities in the United States?*

X. H.: We have a turnover of 1 billion dollars in North America (including Canada). There is no point in us entering the construction sector in the US because it does not make a lot of money. Other sectors offer better financial security such as civil engineering, roads, electrical engineering, services linked to car parks, and a certain number of concessions. The plan which the new President has just announced might be interesting for us, but its effects will only really be felt in a few years' time. The US is still a country where it is dangerous to do business because power relations there are very brutal.

My personal experience has taught me that in the contracting professions, apart from having know-how, it was crucial to acquire a very precise understanding of cultures and local codes. There is no guarantee that we will be able to succeed with an equivalent of the South Europe-Atlantic TGV train line in California or Saudi Arabia.

Consequently, each of our business units chooses a few countries and takes the time and effort to understand their culture properly. This is why our road divisions are particularly attracted to Canada and are expanding there. Our electrical engineers are not attracted by Canada, but this does not matter. I do not insist that we are present everywhere.

Q.: *What factors determine the closure of a business unit?*

X. H.: Tight management does not allow us to keep a business unit which is constantly losing money. Our intermediary directors, each of whom is in charge of, manages and controls ten to twelve business units, are authorised to restructure them if necessary.

Vinci Energies has its own sort of 'amputation syndrome': once a business unit becomes too big, it is divided in two so that it cannot sit back on its laurels. The two units which are then formed are similar in style to start-ups. Often the manager who was able to make them grow to this extent gets promoted, and is then put in charge of them. Splitting the unit into two may be traumatic for the teams involved who may feel that they are being penalised for their success. Therefore, we have to 'reignite' their enthusiasm.

Q.: *Does Vinci have its own sort of 'risk culture'?*

X. H.: Vinci Immobilier could be the leader in its sector in France, but I deliberately limited its growth. I was traumatised by the 1992-1996 crisis during which property commitments took on such proportions that companies had to sell at a loss because of pressure from their shareholders. I concluded that it was better to limit the property risk in order to weather the storm more easily. This supposes that one knows one's limits during prosperous periods, but such decisions are not always understood by everyone at the time.

Likewise, the size of business units is such that they are able to absorb the setbacks which are inherent in their profession. Vinci Construction Grands Projets, which only handles very large projects, must have the size and level of funds which are sufficient to be able to survive sudden changes which indeed exist: every year our worksites cost us between 50 and 100 million Euros. If a smaller unit were to handle this scale of project, it would not be able to survive such setbacks.

Finally, and importantly, it is essential to allow business units to organise funds. This allows them to take risks with peace of mind, and consequently to manage those risks more efficiently.

Q.: *How do you reconcile this reasoning with the short-term pressure applied by analysts and investors?*

X. H.: One has to try to devise a project and then explain it to the analysts and investors. If one does this, one removes oneself from short-term reasoning and takes back the control while still listening to what people are saying. In the end, the Group almost chooses its shareholders itself. The hedge funds, for example, are not my prime target.

Responsibility in the network

Q.: *In such a decentralised environment, what indicators do you use?*

X. H.: Each level of the hierarchy ensures its own management control. The head office clearly takes on this function in order to meet financial obligations, but it is extremely reduced. It is useless having armies of auditors who just get in the way.

This illustrates a fundamental principle: authority and responsibility necessarily go hand in hand. If one gives authority to a colleague this supposes that he can assume the responsibility. It follows that one cannot give responsibility to someone without having given him the relevant authority. When a dysfunction takes place in a unit, it is always because of a separation between these two. The problem associated with someone who controls management is that he thinks that he has the authority whereas he does not assume the responsibility.

Q.: *Vinci is becoming increasingly international. How do you manage this growth with respect to your executives?*

X. H.: Our organisation is managed by people living locally: German employees work in our German sites (Germany is our second most important country, and only about fifteen French people work there), Swedes work in Sweden, Chileans in Chile, and so on. The important area where we need to make progress is how we should 'internationalise' our highest levels of governance. For the time being, the executive committee is exclusively French. This will change with time, but I refuse to move forward with positive discrimination and bring in people who do not have enough managerial legitimacy. Internationalisation requires time.

Q.: *To what extent has digital technology changed the way you work?*

X. H.: Our organisational model is resolutely modern and conforms to changes in the digital sector. Moreover, it satisfies the expectations of the younger generation. New technologies enhance the inherent value of the way we work in a network. Nonetheless, we should not get carried away and think that they are enough to make cultures change. A company which keeps a hierarchical pyramid structure would not be able to change simply if one put a collaborative social network in place.

Very positive management

Q.: *What are the suitable conditions which enable 'wild grass' to flower? What happens to employees who do not manage to sow 'wild grass'?*

X. H.: I am always struck when I hear colleagues saying that they only recruit 'champions'. I think that anyone who is in a caring environment, accompanied by managers who want them to progress, is capable of creating

extraordinary things. Managers' aims are to recruit 'normal' individuals, and do what is necessary so that their talents and abilities – which they did not know they had – emerge. When colleagues realise that our intention is to make them progress even further, we reap the rewards of their gratitude. This is the basis of management.

When one takes away self-censorship, the 'wild grass' can flower. And, when the 'wild grass' has to be cut, it should be done with tact and sensitivity so that future initiatives can emerge. Rather than punishing failures, one should start again from scratch in order to encourage new, productive situations. A colleague who did not perform well in a certain context may prove to be excellent in a different environment.

The organisation should also demonstrate that it knows how to listen to what employees have to say, including workers on building sites. So much can be learned. Who is better placed than workers to understand how we can work better, increase our performance and satisfy clients? The manager should create the conditions to make these people want to express their opinions.

Q.: Do you believe in the right to fail?

X. H.: Of course. I only believe in positive management. One learns from one's successes, not one's failures. It is useless to concentrate on one's failures as they are already sufficiently disturbing. On the other hand, managers should celebrate success. It is a way of breathing energy and optimism into one's employees before facing difficulties.

Q.: Vinci cannot promise its new recruits preformatted career paths. How do you attract talented people?

X. H.: We tell them to put their boots on and visit one of our building sites in Siberia or Colombia – and this motivates them! Our last important project was the construction of 350 kilometres of pipeline for ExxonMobil in the middle of the Papua New Guinea rainforest. We sent about ten of our young colleagues out there, mostly women, and they found it fascinating. They were sure that this project gave them the opportunity to experience one of the last adventures possible on the planet.

This is the way in which we attract talented people. Young people are less concerned about their career path than working in an environment which is not very hierarchical, but which has meaning for them. Our managerial practices correspond to this need, and the employee shareholding scheme in particular. Clearly these young people are more versatile than their elders. We have to let them leave to go globetrotting with the knowledge that they will come back and work for us afterwards. They show as much responsibility and autonomy as the previous generation, and are equally capable of becoming business unit managers. To achieve this, it is important that we get their foot in the door quickly. It is not unusual for us to entrust a Vinci Energies business unit making 10 million Euros to an employee who is less than thirty years old. If he manages to mobilise the necessary internal resources to handle this challenge, we can help him progress even further in his career. The only limitations are those he imposes on himself: they tend to be related to his level of studies which he judges to be insufficient. The art of management consists of shattering these imaginary glass ceilings.

Incidentally, and contrary to other industrial groups, the starting salaries at Vinci Energies do not depend on the level of initial training. I would rather that the manager of a business unit fixes the starting salary, even if he makes a mistake, rather than being made to follow a pre-determined grid. This responsibility also makes the manager mature professionally.

Q.: How do you choose your business unit managers?

X. H.: I make the decisions concerning people who are in my closest circle, and I ask to be consulted systematically for people who are in the next closest circle. Beyond that, I influence the decision-maker: I give my opinion when people ask me for it, but I also let people know it when I am not asked... I know a large part of my staff very well and appreciate their strengths and weaknesses, and also their family constraints. Therefore, I have an opinion about how the teams should be formed so that they function well.

Q.: All in all, what is the job of a CEO in an inverted pyramid structure?

X. H.: It requires limitless managerial resources. I constantly have to be in touch with teams everywhere in the world so that the Group's culture – our core asset – does not dwindle.

I also have to fight against the phenomenon of 'managerial regression' which, having created a decentralised structure, requires for the managers to take over whenever a new major crisis takes place. The more difficult times become, the more essential it is to make one's employees assume their responsibilities and be by their side.

From a more formal point of view, I make a point of systematically making decisions in certain projects, both those which undertake a high degree of risk and those which concern acquisitions, regardless of their size, in order to ensure that they are in keeping with the Group's culture.

Corporate social responsibility: a vital issue

Q.: *It is still difficult to establish correlations between certain elements of governance – notably refusing bribes – and financial performance. In some countries, refusing to be part of corruption is bad for business. How do you handle these sorts of contradictions?*

X. H.: Our market share abroad is tiny. Therefore, we are free to choose countries where there is no corruption. For example, we have no sites in China. The board of directors criticised me for this but, I think that the risk was too big.

Everyone in the Group is aware that corruption is a fatal sin – in the true sense of the word. It would be the end for us if we committed a crime like this. Our employees are our main shareholders and we would bring them down with us. It would be unbearable.

Q.: *Does your capacity to address environmental and social issues have any weight in calls for tender?*

X. H.: Unfortunately, public contracts operate according to a series of processes which proceed in a sequential fashion, and which relegate environmental issues to an accessory role. Traditionally, the mayor of a small town who wants to build a school starts by drawing up functional specifications. He then employs an architect who designs a building and gives his plans to an external engineering firm. This firm creates a technical statement of works booklet from which the call for tender is devised. Companies such as Vinci are only solicited at the end of this process. In other words, we have to create what was designed early on in the process by others, and we are not able to use our expertise in terms of energy efficiency.

As far as projects for new buildings are concerned, it is worth going against sequential functioning and implement concurrent engineering processes instead. This means that we have to work with an architect early on in the project, as well as experts in climate engineering, structures, fluids, and so on, and specify to them the desired energetic characteristics. Under these conditions, it is possible to produce an end result which keeps to the initial budget and respects the environment.

We only really have some input about these subjects when we are the property developer, via Vinci Immobilier, or in the context of concessions and the procedure of design-construction. However, for more than 85% of our projects, sequential logic is imposed. From this point of view, the main advantage of the public-private partnership is related to the long-term responsibilities which result. When a company knows that it will be in charge of the design, construction, operation, maintenance and even dismantlement of an infrastructure, it is much more careful about its environmental performance.

Q.: *How do you defend this vision when you are head-to-head with companies which are not interested in corporate social responsibility?*

X. H.: Corporate social responsibility is not a cost but is part of success. Likewise, the building sites which have the highest level of security also have the best performances in terms of quality and keeping to the budget.

We have had companies in Africa for seventy-five years, and we are solidly established in about thirty countries there. We thought that we would suffer enormously when Chinese companies started arriving there fifteen years ago. However, the reaction of our local teams was to go upmarket, choosing complex subjects, and differentiating themselves on parameters other than price. Today our African bitumen manufacturing factories emit even less

particles than their French equivalents, and the worksites are highly regarded in terms of safety. The Group also has socio-economic commitments in its different foundations which are well established. All in all, we have never been as prosperous in Africa as when the Chinese arrived! Our local clients are supporters of corporate social responsibility and work with us (despite our slightly higher prices) on the grounds that we provide staff training, give expatriate status to certain executives working in countries other than their own (with benefits such as social security, accommodation, schooling, return trips home, and so on), support hospitals and schools, and so on. Corporate social responsibility is above all a wonderful opportunity to reinvent ourselves, as was similarly the case with quality standards when they were issued a few decades ago.

Europe, and France in particular, have a considerable competitive advantage which is that they are attached to a form of capitalism which is broadly tinged with humanism – and which works. This is a differentiating factor which one has to assume, develop and make sure people know about.

■ Presentation of the speaker ■

Xavier Huillard: graduate of the École Polytechnique and the École nationale des ponts et chaussées. Most of his career has been spent in the construction professions in France and abroad. He started working for Sogea in December 1996 as deputy CEO in charge of the international business and specific construction works, and became CEO in 1998. He was appointed deputy CEO of Vinci in March 1998, and was president of Vinci Construction from 2000 to 2002. He was appointed managing director of Vinci and was CEO of Vinci Energies from 2002 to 2004. He was president of Vinci Energies from 2004 to 2005. He became director and general manager of Vinci in 2006 and CEO on May 6th, 2010. He was appointed president of the Institut de l'entreprise on January 18th, 2011. He is the permanent representative of Vinci on the Aéroports de Paris' board of directors.

Translation by Rachel Marlin (rjmarlin@gmail.com)
