

Bernard & Ismael: Bridging the Generation Gap



When experience meets fresh perspective, something more than knowledge transfer can happen – a genuine dialogue across generations. At the end of 2025, Bernard Van Der Schrick, Rely's Engineering & Technology Manager with over four decades of industry expertise, welcomed Ismael Saez, then a final-year student at ULB's Engineering School, for a two-month internship. In a company like Rely, where expertise is built through years of projects, client interactions and problem-solving, passing knowledge from one generation to the next is part of what helps the business grow and innovate. But knowledge transfer is rarely a one-way process. While experienced professionals share lessons learned over the course of their careers, younger engineers bring new perspectives, fresh approaches and the latest academic insights.

Tell us about the first time you met. What were your impressions? How did it go?

Ismael: We had our first meeting soon after I applied to the internship, based on a flyer I got from my engineering university (ULB). I remember it was a pretty straightforward online meeting. We talked about the project - developing a model to evaluate the performance of different ammonia production plant configurations - and after some exchanges, we rapidly got to accept the internship.

Bernard: Indeed. I had written a short note describing the internship subject and my expectations. When we first met, it took us barely half an hour to reach a common understanding on the objectives and, quite naturally, the process started.

You are both not of the same generation. Was this a strength, or did it create misunderstandings?

Ismael: Clearly a strength! Bernard has lots of years of experience in the industry, and I'm fresh out from

university. Our two profiles are very complementary, combining some of the recent courses or new technologies I learned at school with Bernard's experience and knowledge of the industry. It's a win-win case for the project, and for both of us.

Bernard: Indeed, win-win is really the keyword. Of

course, there is a gap of generation. But as my youngest son is in his last year of engineering school, just two years younger than Ismael, I'd say I'm not totally out of the picture! I've had a lot of interns during my career. For me, it's key to stay aware of the new generations. Moreover, personally,

I like to share experience. I really think sharing experience is something we must do for the next generations. Within Rely, we have quite a dispersion of the age of the people, and that's part of our strengths.

What would you point out of what you've learned during this experience?

Ismael: From a technical point of view, of course, I learned a lot about the ammonia industry, of which I didn't know anything about. But I also simply learned a lot from working in a private company, seeing the importance of dedicating time to in-depth file analysis, really giving deep thoughts into new ideas. I also learned by observing Bernard and the way he works with people, how he organizes himself. Having someone to look up to is really important for a young engineer like me.

Bernard: As Ismael was very quick and quite autonomous on the subject, it's been an exercise of imagination to bring something to him! Frankly



Combining our two profiles – from two different generations, has been a win-win case for the project, and for us both.

-Ismael



People say the new generation is less engaged in learning. Bernard and Ismael prove that wrong.



Bernard Van Der Schrick

Role at Rely:

Engineering & Technology Manager

Year of graduation:

1986

Education:

Chemical Engineer – ULB
(Université libre de Bruxelles)



Ismael Saez

Role at Rely:

Intern

Year of graduation:

2026

Education:

Electromechanical Engineer – ULB
(Université libre de Bruxelles)

speaking, it was quite a challenge to continue bringing new ideas on problem solving. Therefore, I really learned a lot!

Talking about your "mentor- mentee" relationship, what made it so valuable according to you?

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Sharing experience is something we must do for the next generations.

-Bernard

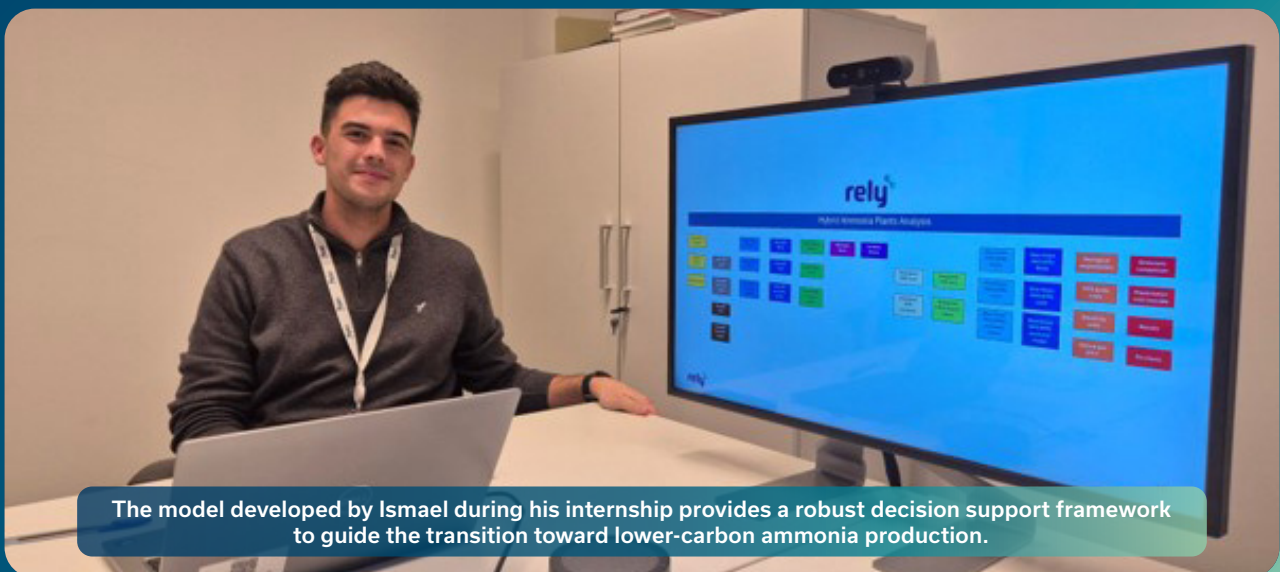
Ismael: Definitely, the time Bernard took for me is what made it so valuable. It's not so obvious that, when you join a company for such a short internship, your supervisor takes such a big interest on you. You hear so many stories about interns making coffees and not doing much... Bernard always had time for me, even afterwards when I worked on my thesis. I appreciated that a lot.

A decision-making model supporting Project Enablement Studies

Under the supervision of Bernard, Ismael designed a powerful model to evaluate the technical, economic, and environmental performance of different ammonia production plant configurations, with a particular focus on hybrid systems combining conventional grey ammonia units and green hydrogen-based processes. It enables an appraisal of gradual decarbonization pathways by simulating partial substitution of fossil-based hydrogen with renewable hydrogen, rather than assuming a full and immediate shift. This scenario is likely to be more realistic due to limited need of budget and electrical supply.

By comparing multiple integration scenarios, the tool helps identify optimal strategies in terms of emissions reduction, operational feasibility, and cost efficiency. It also incorporates market dynamics, notably electricity price variability, to assess how production can be optimized to improve profitability.

Overall, the model provides a robust decision-support framework to guide the transition toward lower-carbon ammonia production while balancing industrial, environmental, and economic constraints. It represents an asset for Rely to strengthen its early engagement capabilities (also called Project Enablement Studies) and develop forward-looking, client-centric solutions in a rapidly evolving energy landscape.



The model developed by Ismael during his internship provides a robust decision support framework to guide the transition toward lower-carbon ammonia production.

ULB, the connection point

Sharing the same academic roots at University of Brussels (ULB) naturally created an immediate point of connection between Bernard and Ismael.

For Ismael, it was a simple but meaningful bond – the familiarity of a place, and the pleasure of exchanging with someone who had walked the same halls years before. For Bernard, it became an opportunity to reconnect more actively with the University, from attending Ismael's thesis presentation to returning to the classroom to engage with a new generation of students.

ULB

Bernard: Our relation was very easy, simple and interactive. I'm used to give freedom at the beginning, just giving the tools to work, not being too directive. It was a very good fit, with Ismael being able to work quite autonomously. Of course, we also worked close together, but with full flexibility. I'm pleased to have been able to share with Ismaël some of the lessons that only come with experience: how to maintain critical thinking when working with data, assess data consistency, reconcile conflicting information, identify values with unrealistic orders of magnitude, and bridge gaps when data is incomplete.

Beside what you both learned and experienced, how will this be useful to Rely?

Bernard: Clearly, the model developed by Ismael is very useful (*Ed. Note: See box on page 3*). We now have a simple and powerful tool to appraise the economics of a hybrid grey/green ammonia

plant model. The tool is very well shaped and easy to parameter. In our industry where there is a strong pressure to reduce the time for the feasibility study, it's quite a distinctive asset.

What's the one thing you will take away from this experience?

Ismael: For me, it's the personal relationship I developed with Bernard. I learned a lot from him. All the attention he's put into me and the project was quite impressive. It's a relationship that I will cherish for many years, and that's what I appreciate the most.

Bernard: My confidence in the young generation! With Ismael, I have the demonstration that the young generation is well-trained, very competent, and is demanding to work and express itself. This was as very, very enriching experience. ■

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Ismael and I, it was
a very good fit!
-Bernard

Bonus

Watch the full interview video here.

