

INSEAD and Syngenta

How can our planet feed its ever-growing population with ever-dwindling resources?



To Syngenta, one of the world's largest and most international agribusiness companies, the above question is not a remote worry but a daily business challenge. In practical terms, Syngenta has to keep driving farmer productivity with improved products in a highly diverse and technical global marketplace stretching from vast industrialised farms in the US to tiny smallholdings in India.

In 2003 Syngenta's leaders took the decision that sales and marketing held the key. Their goal was not simply to become closer to customers and understand what they wanted. It was also to provide exactly what the customer wanted through marketing-led innovation.

The company set about building a world-class marketing and sales organisation through several highly successful internal initiatives. However, these workshops and programmes also revealed that the marketing executives needed more "joined-up" thinking to create more effective country marketing plans. Syngenta started looking for an external partner with an outstanding reputation for developing international marketing skills.

As the "Business School for the World®" – with two full campuses in Europe and Asia – INSEAD seemed the natural choice. More importantly, the school had a completely flexible approach to co-creating programmes and proposed a fully customised simulation rather than an off-the-shelf adaptation of an existing programme.

"The INSEAD professors showed painstaking attention to detail," says David Marshall, Syngenta's Global Head of Marketing and Sales Development. "This involved real live tests with experts and an MBA cohort, so we were confident it would go well."





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And it did. The two-module “Academy”, launched in 2005, has – over 10 years, four continents and 34 cohorts – stimulated a fully integrated, customer-focused mindset.

Key to its effectiveness is Valuland, a simulated Syngenta country market devised by INSEAD professor David Midgley and his team. Crucially, too, all participants work with tutors and managers to define a real-life project with associated KPIs. They do not “graduate” until their business targets have been hit. “We measure Academy success by project completion,” explains Marshall.

So successful is the Academy that in 2010 Syngenta approached INSEAD to co-create a second programme. This time the goal was to implement a major strategic shift – away from “product thinking” to full “customer solutions”.

The result was the Excellerator programme, which takes Syngenta’s national marketing teams beyond simulation to real-world, real-time innovation. Across two modules and three months, participants devise a business idea, which they finally pitch to Syngenta leaders to obtain funding. Four years and 20 Excellerators later, there are many innovative solutions in the pipeline and several already on the market.

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The moral of these success stories is that the impact of executive education is not limited just to business. Sometimes it extends to global challenges as well.

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