



INSEAD Case Studies Highlight Sustainable Solutions: 2022/2023



INSEAD excels in teaching the case study method in its classrooms, challenging students to delve into real-world issues. This academic year, INSEAD faculty produced 14 thought-provoking sustainability cases, spotlighting sustainable business practices across 8 different industries such as finance, energy and fashion. Discover these 14 research highlights from the 2022/2023 academic year:

Health and Well-being

Janani, an affiliate of the NGO, **DKT International**, delivers reproductive health products and services to low-income consumers from its base in Patna, Bihar. Although Janani has grown tremendously and now provides coverage to almost all of India, it is still heavily reliant on donor funding. In this case, **Professor Amitava Chattopadhyay** examines Janani's challenges to become a self-sustaining social enterprise. The challenge for Janani is to seize market opportunities while staying true to its mission.

Another case outlines the challenges faced by Pradeep Kakkattil, the founder of the **Office of Innovation at UNAIDS**, the United Nations agency responsible for coordinating global action on AIDS. In its first two years, his team grew from two to six,

and formed over 100 global partnerships. INSEAD Professor [Felipe Monteiro](#) and Visiting Professor [Tina Ambos](#) explore the challenges in the team's strategic direction, including how the innovation unit at UNAIDS is structured and coexists within such a bureaucratic organisation. According to Professor Monteiro *"students showed surprise in discovering that even international non-profit organizations, which are characterized by high levels of bureaucracy and a risk averse culture, have formalized innovation structures, allowing them to address their social missions more efficiently and fast-track innovation for the SDGs."*

Financial Sustainability

Professor [Atalay Atasu](#) delves deeper into the story of [Ambienta](#), an asset management company based in Italy that embraced sustainable investing early on. Ambienta's core mission is captured in the statement, "Sustainability adds value." From the start, Nino Tronchetti Provera, Ambienta's founder and managing partner, saw sustainability as a "mega-trend" with broad implications for the national economy. The company developed a methodology (the Environmental Impact Analysis or EIA) to demystify the linkage between financial returns and doing good for the planet. [Part A](#) of this two-part case introduces the company and its distinctive position in the industry. [Part B](#) puts readers into the shoes of Ambienta's Sustainability & Strategy head as they apply the EIA to four hypothetical companies.

Communication and Technology

The mobile phone industry is notorious for its lack of sustainability and transparency. [Fairphone](#) started as a campaign to raise awareness about "conflict minerals" and the challenges faced by miners extracting tantalum in Africa, a rare earth element used in electronics and alloys. It evolved into a social enterprise with the launch of its first "fair phone", the FP1, containing conflict-free tantalum. Fairphone was expensive and appealed mostly to die-hard "dark greens" who valued sustainable living over functionality. When Eva Gouwens joined as CEO in 2017, her task was to make Fairphone more commercially oriented, while maintaining its core mission. Professor [N. Craig Smith](#)'s case outlines the changes implemented and the pivotal product launch of the FP3. This launch not only led to commercial success but set an example for the rest of the industry.

Agricultural Practices

In this three-part case, Professors [Anton S. Ovchinnikov](#) and [Spyros Zoumpoulis](#) examine how [Victory Farms](#), one of the largest aquaculture operations in Africa, can leverage customer transaction data. The aim is to enhance value for customers, partners and local communities. [Part A](#) introduces Victory Farms, a sustainable fish farm on Lake Victoria in Kenya, and outlines data-driven opportunities. [Part B](#) focuses on customer segmentation and [Part C](#) presents a "buy now, pay later" credit offering.

This case effectively teaches the “Agriculture 4.0” concept and the specific data-driven opportunities it presents.

Portuguese Language: Utilities and Multinationals

Professor [Felipe Monteiro](#) translated his 2019 case study on Italy’s multinational [Enel Group](#) into Portuguese. The case explores how one of the largest power utilities companies in the world embraced the transformation of the energy sector. It explores how the multinational combined open innovation with sustainability to create what the company calls “Innovability”.

Sustainable Energy Solutions

[Schneider Electric](#) is an industry pioneer undergoing a “twin transition” to a digital and sustainable solution provider. In this case, Professor Chengyi Lin examines why the transformation within the company got off to a slow start. He provides insights on how to lead a strategic transformation in a structured manner.

Professors [Chan Kim](#) and [Renée Mauborgne](#) explore green energy through China’s [Tongwei Group](#), a global leader in both aquafeeds and photovoltaics. The case “*illustrates how the theory of nondisruptive creation offers a positive-sum approach to sustainability that effectively aligns economic and social good.*” The Tongwei group integrated high-yield aquacultural ponds with water-based PV plants. This created a model for sustainable economic development in regions with scarce utilisable land resources and high demand for electricity. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne explain “*the focus of sustainability has often been on social good. Business profit and growth are often hidden and take a backseat to sustainability. In contrast, the Tongwei case shows how both profitable growth and sustainability can be pursued in tandem with nondisruptive creation.*”

Retail Innovation

Professor [Felipe Monteiro’s](#) case focuses on [Haier Europe](#), a branch of the Chinese Haier Group, a global leader in home appliances. The case explores Haier’s innovative management model ‘RenDanHeYi’ and how the leadership team translated the system (conceived in China’s cultural and institutional environment) to a European setting. The case also evaluates how this contributed to the group’s extraordinary rate of growth amidst fierce competition. This was achieved by focusing on the local customer and keeping costs low in a post-Covid environment. Challenges included soaring inflation, the conflict in Ukraine and mounting pressure on the home appliances industry to become more environmentally sustainable.

Ethical Apparel

In 2006, [Blake Mycoskie founded TOMS](#) (originally called TOMS Shoes), pioneering a “buy-one-give-one” model that integrated philanthropy into the business strategy. This innovative approach gained consumer acclaim and widespread recognition for its potential to achieve social impact through business. Professor [Jasjit Singh’s](#) case emphasises the importance of having a suitable impact strategy alongside a solid business model when building such ventures.

Professors in Strategy [Andrew Shipilov](#) and [Nathan Furr](#) explore the story of Norwegian executive, Anita Krohn Traaseth. A seasoned mentor for emerging professionals, Krohn Traaseth transformed her expertise into podcasts, books and eventually [KROHN "slow fashion" house](#). The case demonstrates that environmentally sustainable business practices can be as profitable, or even surpass, approaches like “fast fashion”.

Every day we witness how social and climate impacts are moving to the center of business operational considerations. At INSEAD we recognise that business leaders need to be well-versed to develop sound and sophisticated strategies to operating enterprises in this rapidly changing world. These real-world case studies not only serve as valuable learning tools but offer a stimulating reflection on the role of business in society. They highlight how organisations can strive for self-sustainability, embrace innovative methodologies, and navigate the evolving landscape of socially conscious business practices while coexisting with profitability. The Hoffmann Institute continues to support INSEAD faculty to develop new theories, insights, and business models that drive prosperity, societal and environmental progress.

All INSEAD cases are available for purchase at [INSEAD publishing](#)

To read about sustainability case studies from the 2021/22 academic year see here: https://www.insead.edu/blog/hoffmann-global-institute-business-and-society/research-drives-sustainability-case-studies?_ref=finder

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