

INSEAD

ENGIE  
University

# Customer Academy ENGIE University X INSEAD





# Contents

4,000 words

# Summary

● **ENGIE is an organisation on a decades-long voyage of transformation – from a traditional energy utility and state monopoly to a pioneer of carbon reduction and services to customers.**

To support this evolution, **ENGIE** University, the company's in-house university approached **INSEAD** about the possibility of developing a programme in customer-centricity and service mindset.

The joint team devised the **ENGIE** Customer Academy, a compact, sharp B2B-marketing bootcamp – but not just for marketing staff. The central idea was that participants would come from across functions and business units to break down silos by learning together. In addition, they would apply their learning as “internal consultants” for real-life challenges experienced by **ENGIE** Global Account Managers (GAMs).

However, before the programme could take place, the global pandemic struck. The bootcamp was reconfigured into a digitally delivered blended programme of four-half days over the course of one month, complemented with specially recorded

learning capsules of bite-size lectures and reflection exercises. The new format brought not only logistical but educational benefits, as participants were able to learn at their own pace, maximising the impact of the plenary sessions, and could put their learning into practice between modules.

Two intakes have completed the programme so far. Not only have the participants adopted new customer-service and silo-busting practices; but the GAMs have also applied several of the internal consultants' recommendations. The programme has been so successful that two additional cohorts started in March 2021, with completion due in April.

The partnership between **ENGIE** University and **INSEAD** has not brought overnight change to the company but it has given the process of transformation much-needed momentum. It is a small but vitally important step on a long voyage.



# Introduction



**ENGIE** is a global player in low-carbon energy and services.

It is a leading industrial company in low-carbon power generation (mainly based on natural gas, nuclear power and renewables), energy infrastructures and energy solutions. Its purpose is to accelerate the transition towards a carbon-neutral world, by reducing the consumption of energy, greening the supply of energy and enabling progress through innovative low-carbon technologies and solutions, data and partnerships.

**ENGIE** has a renewable capacity of 30 GW and, between 2016 and 2019, reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 59%. During this period, it increased renewable energy-production capacity by 19% and decreased coal capacity by 72%. The ambition of **ENGIE** is to be the leader in the global energy transition. The Group currently employs 170,000 people worldwide and in 2019 achieved revenues of €60.1 billion.



**INSEAD** is a global leader in business education and research, the most international of the world's great business schools.

Its mission is to bring together people, cultures and ideas to develop responsible leaders who transform business and society.

Thanks to locations in Europe (France), Asia (Singapore), the Middle East (Abu Dhabi) and North America (San Francisco), alliances with leading schools throughout the world and a wide portfolio of digital programmes, **INSEAD**'s activities span the globe.

In 2020, the school had 165 faculty members from 41 countries, 1,300 students on degree programmes and 11,000 executive education participants.





# The Challenge

# The Challenge:

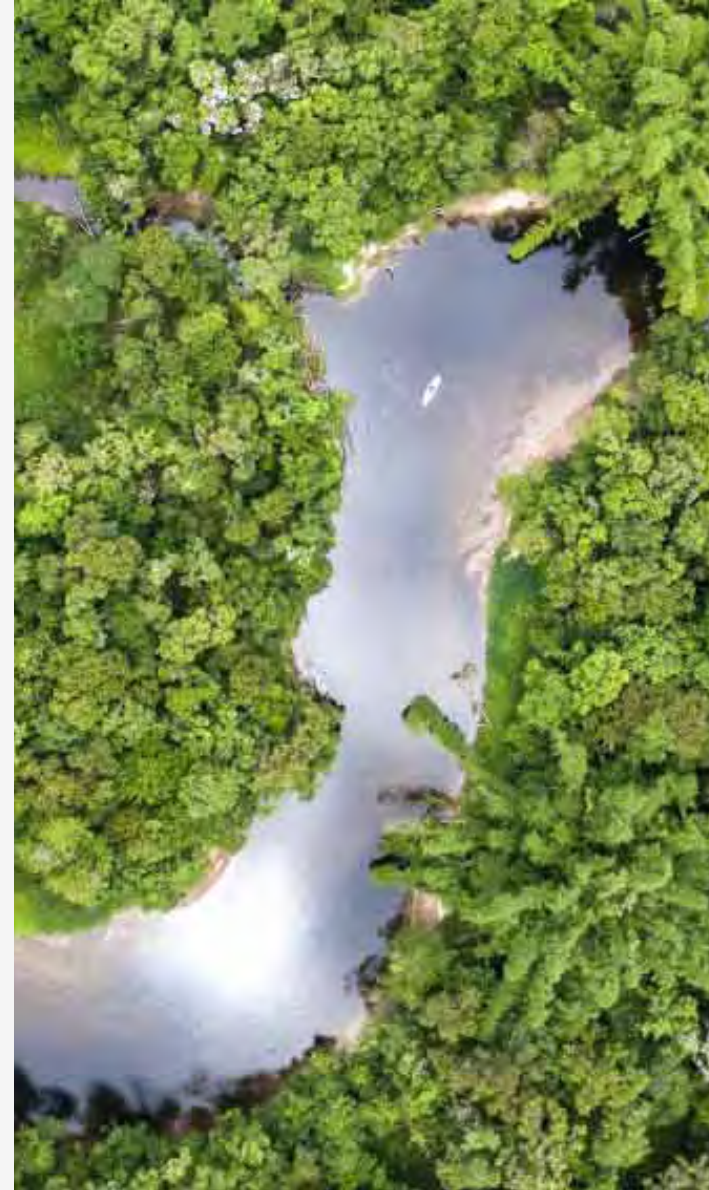
## A Voyage of Transformation

Today, ENGIE is known as a global pioneer in carbon reduction. But behind the cutting-edge, sustainable identity there is a long story.

The company was created in 2008 through the merge of two French-headquartered utilities:

- Gaz de France was founded by the French government in the aftermath of World War II to supply gas to the nation. At the time of the merger it was 35% state owned.
- Suez could trace its origins even further back – to the company founded in the middle of the nineteenth century to build the Suez Canal.

GDF SUEZ changed its name to **ENGIE** in 2015 to reflect an increasingly global outlook. In 2016 it adopted a new strategy focused on a neutral-carbon future, withdrawing progressively from the coal business, producing energy as locally as possible and using digital technology to maximise efficiency.



Since 2016 it has increased renewable energy production capacity by 19%, reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 59% and decreased use of coal by 72%. The company is the #1 producer of both onshore wind and solar electricity in France, #2 globally in charging stations for electric vehicles and #1 generator of thermal energy in the world (with growing reliance on renewable gas and hydrogen).

**Historically**, the Group was mainly an asset-driven organisation with engineering and operational excellence in its DNA. But **ENGIE's** business model has also come a long way since 2016, evolving from energy as a “commodity” or “infrastructure business” to energy as a “service”.

There were initially two distinct situations within the group regarding customer relationships: one for the already service businesses, the other for the energy businesses. On the services side, people were by nature closer to the customer. On the gas and power side, there was initially less need for customer-centricity but growing deregulation and new markets were changing the relationship with the client. In addition, there was a strong need to address the customer with a holistic approach, creating more value through global offers and leveraging internal synergies.

With these challenges in mind, **ENGIE** created new structures, most notably, **ENGIE Impact**, a consultancy arm serving cities and companies and designed to accelerate the sustainability revolution. As part of **ENGIE Impact**, a **Key Client Office** was established to manage relationships with

the top 20 clients worldwide, with 10 **Global Account Managers**, each responsible for two major multinational customers.

However, everyone knows that it takes more than a new name, a new strategy, new investments and new organisational structures to make change happen. Hearts and minds also have to evolve. So do skills. And **ENGIE** was aiming for nothing short of excellence in customer relationships throughout the Group, with consistent values and positioning that would create a recognisable **ENGIE** “signature” for all customers.

Overall, **ENGIE** had to adopt a customer focus and service mindset in order to make the new roles and structures work – and to help break down internal silos. It was a question of changing thought processes, not just changing organisational processes. In other words, the solution was education.







**ENGIE** University is the Group's corporate university, focused on the development of managers, while supporting company-wide transformation and growth. It is recognised by managers as a source of inspiration and a place to learn, network and discover their own potential. **ENGIE** University pays great attention to deepening understanding of the Group and its culture. Each programme is customised to map the specific reality and challenges of the people in the company.

Customer-centricity had always been on **ENGIE** University agenda. However, in 2019, given the evolution of the Group, it was clear that **ENGIE** University needed a new, advanced programme in customer-centricity, ideally focused on B2B marketing strategy and closely aligned with the industry's new realities and challenges.

Florence Strulovici, head of **ENGIE** University's activities in Asia-Pacific was asked to investigate possible learning solutions. She and her team knew well that good education – especially in a technically focused environment – is about specifics. They therefore identified **specific skills** to focus on, including understanding service and solution sales, and rapid commercial prototyping. They also identified some **key behaviours**: customer listening; stakeholder engagement and networking; and busting internal silos.

The next step was to explore the market for an external partner who could deliver these skills and behaviours and demonstrate their values in the B2B world, as well as inspiring a new mindset.







# The Commitment



Véronique Singer,  
Director of Corporate Partnerships

# The Commitment:

## A Marketing Programme... And Much, Much More

Meanwhile at **INSEAD**, Véronique Singer, Director of Corporate Partnerships, was on her own long journey of customer-relationship building.

She had first approached **ENGIE** in 2013. “They seemed a perfect fit for **INSEAD**,” she says, “a French centre of excellence that had transformed itself into a global leader – and yet we had never worked together.” There were no suitable projects at the time, but – like any good account manager – Véronique kept in regular touch with **ENGIE**.

Over the years, as customer focus and service culture came to the fore at **ENGIE**, the two organisations met several times. They discussed the potential for big, sweeping programmes on leadership and culture change. Véronique was introduced to Florence and, for her part, introduced **ENGIE** to some of **INSEAD**'s most famous professors in Strategy and Organisational Behaviour.

However, once again, nothing quite clicked into place, even though the two organisations' values were converging even more closely. As the years went by, both were increasingly allying themselves with the cause of sustainability and business as a “force for good”.



In 2019, as Florence and the team at **ENGIE** University considered the behaviours and skills they were seeking to develop, they came to a realisation. It would be marketing education, but at the same time go beyond marketing, covering customer centricity and service excellence and what it means in terms of culture, unique resources and core competencies to achieve sustainable growth. Therefore, the programme would target not only marketing or customer-facing staff. As Florence puts it:

In any large organisation, there is always a danger that the people who deal with customers think they already know how to do it, whereas the people who don't deal with customers think they don't need to know how to do it. We wanted to put both customer-facing and non customer-facing staff together to learn about B2B marketing and service excellence alongside each other.

Knowing the reputation of **INSEAD**'s marketing professors, Florence contacted Véronique to explain the exact nature of the challenge.

Véronique recalls: "We initially talked about professors who were very focused on consumer marketing, whereas, listening to Florence's story, I understood that it was mainly about business-to-business relationships." She therefore suggested Professor Wolfgang Ulaga, who had joined **INSEAD** just the year before, bringing considerable B2B expertise. His official bio on **INSEAD**'s website reads as follows:

Wolfgang focuses on how companies can: achieve marketing and commercial excellence by creating value for and with B2B customers; capture more value through better pricing; strategically compete through service excellence; translate data and analytics into digital B2B services that generate revenues and profits; and differentiate themselves from competition through outstanding customer experiences in professional services and industrial goods markets.

Professor Wolfgang Ulaga,  
Senior Affiliate Professor of Marketing  
INSEAD



The alignment with **ENGIE**'s corporate strategy was uncanny: this was exactly what the Group was trying to achieve. Even better, Wolfgang spoke perfect French and already had considerable knowledge of the energy business.

"But what I most appreciated was his huge appetite to understand **ENGIE**," says Florence. Together, she and Wolfgang embarked on a rigorous process of deep fact-finding, involving interviews with senior group-level executives and leaders of key business units (especially the Key Client Office and **ENGIE** Impact). Wolfgang also interviewed several Global Account Managers and potential participants from a wide range of roles, including the director of a "smart city" project.

"I love to do this," he says with evident enthusiasm. "I learned to speak a whole new language: I became fluent in **ENGIE**."





A person wearing a white hard hat and a light blue shirt is seen from the back, looking out over a body of water towards a large wind farm. The wind turbines are white and extend across the horizon. The scene is set against a clear blue sky. The image is framed by a dark green circular shape on the right side.

# The Initiative

# The Initiative:

## Learning Combined with “Internal Consulting”

To begin with, Wolfgang focused on customising his long experience of teaching B2B marketing to create a learning initiative that met ENGIE’s precise needs.

It helped that his academic career had followed a similar trajectory to **ENGIE**’s and that he knew the pitfalls of so-called “servitisation”:

Over the course of my career, my interests have grown beyond the traditional core of B2B products into B2B services and solutions. Today there is a convergence of product, service and digital... all leading to customer-centricity.

As he was talking to key people at **ENGIE**, Wolfgang had a light-bulb moment. What if a Global Account Manager (GAM) could bring a customer relationship to the table, pose a real-life, current challenge and put **the participants in the position of internal consultants**? The participants could use Wolfgang’s tools (from the “GAPs Model of Service Excellence” to the “Triple-Fit” framework for growing customer relationships) to prototype solutions for the GAM. The learner-consultants would all know **ENGIE** from different angles, so they would be busting silos in real time as well.

It seemed to be a win-win solution. The GAMs would get new ideas, while the participants would gain new skills and mindsets and the impact would be immediately tangible.

Working with Florence, Wolfgang and Véronique came up with a proposal for a **two-day bootcamp** format on **INSEAD**’s campus in Fontainebleau to maximise impact and minimise not only time out of the office but also cost. By now it was January 2020, with the first cohort of about 30 participants due to attend in July and the second in November. The proposal was favourably received, but everyone knows what happened next.

The temptation in March 2020 was to postpone or abandon the project until after the pandemic, but both **INSEAD** and **ENGIE** had adopted an agile approach to the evolving situation. **INSEAD** had switched many of its classes to **live-virtual format** and **ENGIE**’s executives throughout the world were still working as usual, but mainly from home. All the same, the two-day bootcamp format did not seem quite appropriate to the digital patterns of work and life that the world was adopting.

The **ENGIE-INSEAD** team went back to the drawing board. They maintained the “internal consultancy” rationale but refocused the same content around **four half-day modules over the course of about a month**. As with most successful digital learning, the trick was to provide an engaging mixture of **self-paced** (asynchronous) learning and **e-classroom** (synchronous) sessions, the latter combining both whole-class presentations and small-group assignments.

The team soon realised that there were great benefits to the new format. In addition to the GAMs, they had always hoped to include **guest speakers** from the Global Client Solutions and **ENGIE Impact** business units to share best practices. Now, it was much easier to find times to suit speakers and there was no need for them to travel. Mathias Lelièvre, CEO of **ENGIE Impact**, based in New York City, was also enlisted to share the inspiring story of the business unit’s first year and to answer participants’ questions.

In addition, participants would be able to start **applying some of the key concepts** between sessions.

**Reflection exercises** were designed accordingly around: “stop doing”, “start doing” and “continue doing” behaviours. Other assignments involved taking participants out of their **ENGIE** comfort zone and into the mind of the customer, by asking them to recall their own experiences as purchasers of services. Finally, the team decided to maintain this outside-in perspective by using a **case study of Michelin**, another French-based multinational that had made the same journey from products (tyres) to B2B services (fleet-management tyre solutions). The icing on the cake was that **ENGIE’s GAM for Michelin** agreed to contribute.

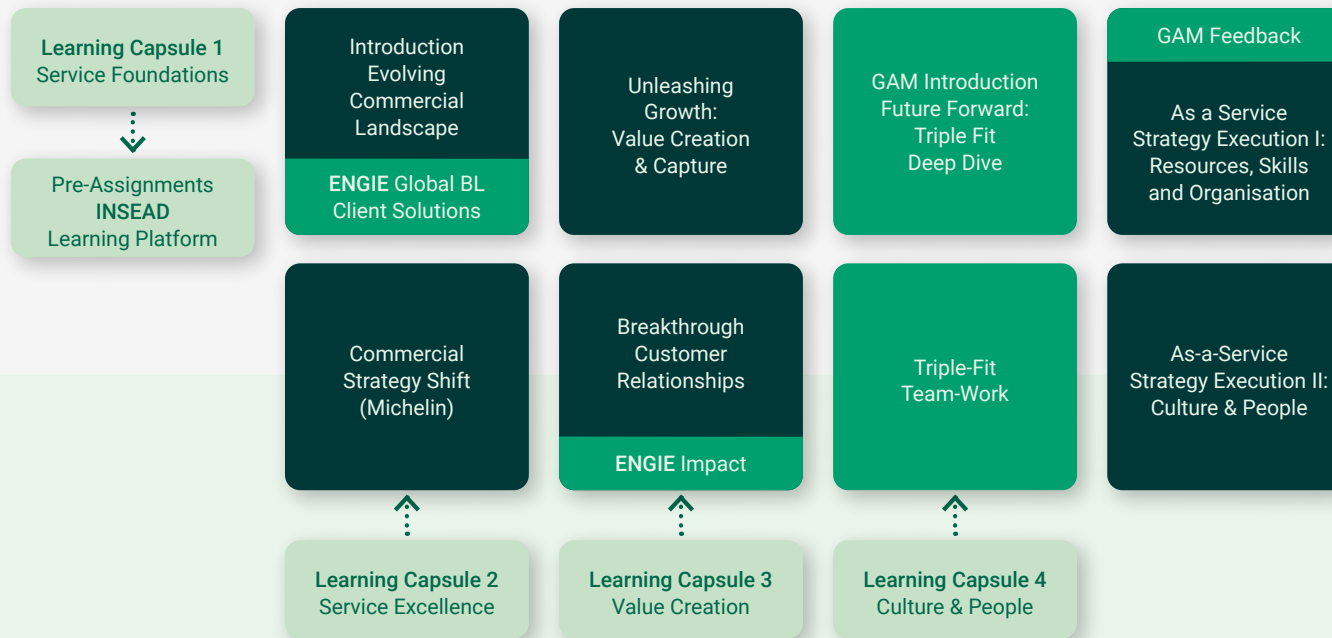




Next, Florence set about selecting other GAMs. Wolfgang devised a series of four **Learning Capsules**, consisting of specially recorded lectures – broken into bite-size clips – to dovetail with the reflection exercises. Florence also began marketing the programme, getting support from key **ENGIE** stakeholders starting with the Group Talent team. Participants

were soon coming through the **ENGIE** University online system in significant numbers.

The **ENGIE** University Customer Academy delivered in September/October and November/December 2020 finally looked like this:



By the time the two cohorts had passed through the Academy, the schedule was only three weeks behind the original pre-pandemic proposal.

Self Paced Learning
  Synchronous Learning
  ENGIE Practice Sharing



# The Impact



# The Impact:

## A Small But Significant Step on the Voyage of Transformation

A short programme initially attended by two classes of 25 to 30 people cannot transform an organisation of 170,000 overnight. However, the Customer Academy marks a significant step on ENGIE's voyage of transformation.

**First**, the programme itself acts as a measure of how far the company has come in terms of recognising the importance of customer-centricity. There were applicants from across the company (*see box for a cross-section of job titles from the first intake*).

### Job Titles in First Intake

- CFO, Head of Strategy and Business Development
- Business Development Director
- Chief Strategy, Human Resources and Business Development Director
- CFO Latin America
- Transactions Director
- Executive Secretary
- CEO Services Australia and New Zealand
- Project Manager
- Commercial Engineer
- Director of Group Consolidation
- Head of Strategic Development
- Chief Legal and Ethics Officer
- Deputy Managing Director and Head of Facilities Management
- Head of AI
- Deputy General Director

**Second**, the **ENGIE** University Customer Academy was so well received that **two further cohorts totalling 75 ENGIE staff have been added to satisfy demand:** one for a similar audience but at the global group level and another specifically for the **ENGIE** Renewables business unit in France (see box). The latter is delivered entirely in French, with all videos re-recorded and all materials translated and localised.

**Third**, the diversity – by function, business unit and location – of participants has achieved the **silobusting behaviour required**. The simple trick of forming buzz-groups of 5–6 carefully assorted participants has further intensified cross-company relationships. “Participants have discovered how others do business with **ENGIE** customers and have learned from the practices and challenges encountered by their peers” says Florence.







Meanwhile, during the course of the programme, using the “start/stop/continue doing” analysis, participants identified the following changes of behaviour in themselves:

- **Listening** to customers more carefully
- Starting to **price in terms of value** (rather than calculating the cost and adding a profit margin)
- Making a **full inventory of the things that have been done for free** in the past
- Working actively to **support Global Account Managers (GAMs)**
- **Lowering costs** by using the newfound internal network to optimise processes and find economies of scale
- No longer **competing internally** with another business unit.
- Removing complexity and lowering customer effort in interactions with clients
- Providing better experiences at lower costs wherever possible

The GAMs, although technically not participants but guest presenters, have also achieved concrete gains. Not only have they built relationships across **ENGIE**; they also came away from the Customer Academy sessions with learning-based ideas that they could apply immediately with their customers (see box).

**Finally**, there have been extra benefits. “We were delighted to note that support functions have used the learning with their ‘internal customers!’” says Florence.

## The Global Account Manager



**Jérôme Thomas** *manages two global accounts: a world-leading telecoms carrier and a global food manufacturer*

I joined **ENGIE** in 2019 after a long career in digital service provision. I knocked on their door talking about customer-centricity and using digital technology to make an impact in the industrial sector, so I suppose that was why I was asked to contribute to the Customer Academy!

The experience was of huge benefit in helping me to understand **ENGIE** and join the internal dots. I still think of myself as new to the company and I'm certainly new to the food industry, the account on which I based my presentation and problem-solving exercise. The programme was also a rare opportunity to reflect on my experiences at **ENGIE** so far – through other people's eyes.

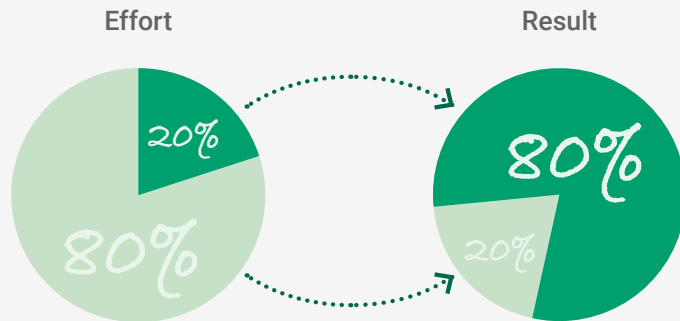
**More specifically**, I analysed the customer relationship using the Triple Fit approach that Wolfgang introduced us to. This enabled me to demonstrate it in practice and to present my main challenges to the class, for example:

- How to roll out a global strategy to a company with 200 plants across the world but hugely divergent **ENGIE** capabilities in the countries concerned?
- How to develop a distinctive value proposition in the increasingly crowded decarbonisation space?



It was Group 5 who presented two ideas that I'm using today.

- **First, applying the Pareto principle** to focus my efforts and find the 20% of the customer's activities and locations that supply 80% of our results. That is, identify the minimum resources to make the maximum impact.



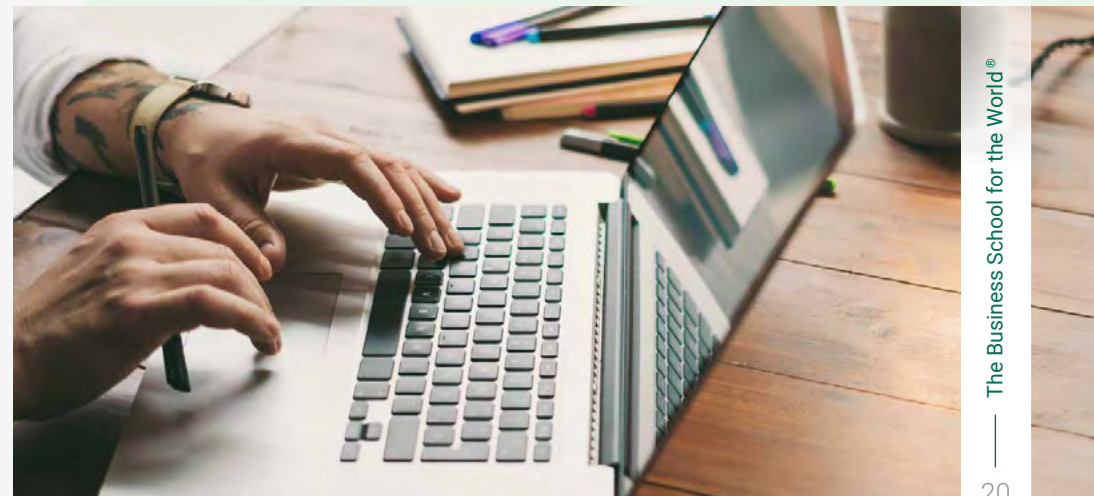
- **Second, using the mutual connection with B Corp** (sustainability certification for businesses) to add value. In particular, there was an opportunity to focus **ENGIE's** efforts on helping the customer to achieve its stated aim of making 30% of its products carbon-neutral.

■ Not important
 ■ Important

**Another impact** has come from working with Florence Blanco, a participant who happened to be involved with my other customer, the telecoms company. From the day we met in the new context, something really clicked and our collaboration was enhanced.

A couple of months later, **we closed a €51 million deal together**. Of course, the programme came too late to affect this deal, but I believe the Customer Academy will help us both to replicate it with other clients more effectively.

Expanding this collaboration is much more effective with a better understanding of what the GAM role can bring to the different business units of the Group for global clients.





## The Business Development Director



**Florence Blanco** works for **ENGIE France Renouvelables**, the company's business unit for renewable energy in France

Until recently the electricity we generated was sold through a mechanism of regulated tenders and on wholesale markets, not directly to customers. However the design of the French market is currently changing and the first Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) between power producers and large corporate customers were signed in 2019. The rise of these corporate PPAs is fuelling the growth of renewable energy and will be a major driver for winning new business in the forthcoming years.

We are also trying to raise our performance by improving how we treat our stakeholders – including colleagues in other **ENGIE** entities and members of local communities – as if they were customers.

The Customer Academy therefore is a great opportunity to support the wider transformation of **ENGIE** France Renouvelables. Since I attended in September/October, there have been several concrete changes:

1. We have allocated **commercial resources to developing PPAs**, including people who can talk to customers (without actually going so far as to create a sales team, which is not part of our remit).



2. We have **launched a survey** to learn about our positioning towards our clients and external stakeholders, including landowners, municipal authorities and local associations, who are all affected by the development of our wind farms, solar photovoltaic power plants and biogas units. For the first time ever, we are tracking data like net promoter scores and customer satisfaction indexes. It's a big cultural change for us!
3. We have created a **project to determine whether we need a CRM tool**.
4. The programme made such an impact on me that I have been working with **INSEAD** and **ENGIE** University to develop the **Customer Academy for ENGIE France Renouvelables to train our management teams among our corporate BU and subsidiaries**. In some ways I'm playing a similar role to a GAM in the previous versions by developing internal challenges based on solar, hydro and biogas.

These may not be sound like huge changes, but if you start with no clients whatsoever, simply succeeding in getting these initiatives going marks a major impact!





Conclusion

# Reflections and conclusions:

## Be the Change You Want to See

Stories like those of Jérôme Thomas and Florence Blanco are currently being enacted across ENGIE.

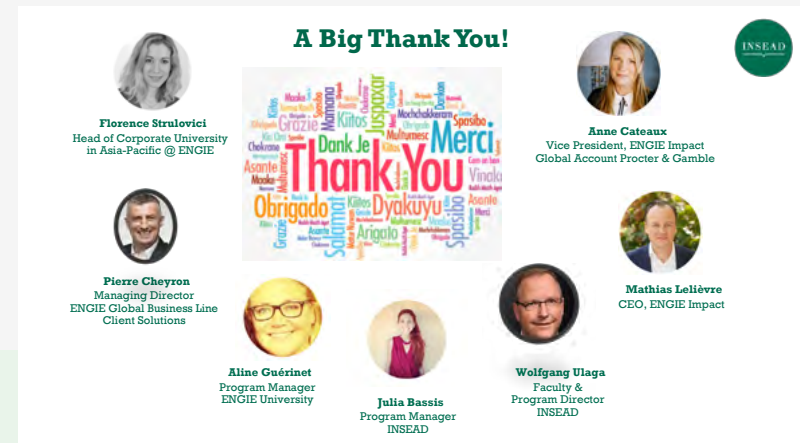
The full impact is yet to come, but there is no doubt already that key success factors include:

- Exposure of non-marketing staff to B2B marketing concepts
- Diverse, silo-busting classes and small-group work
- Consultancy projects and mindset to bring learning to life
- Digital format and structure, allowing for self-paced learning, reflection and application of new techniques

In the words of one participant, “The reflections of the Global Account Managers, allow us to apply the theory immediately to a practical case.”

The **ENGIE** University Customer Academy at **INSEAD** could be summed up by the motto: “Be the change you want to see.” The in-programme silo-busting and consulting projects force participants to model the desired change in behaviour rather than simply learning new techniques together. The close collaboration between Florence, Véronique and Wolfgang is also no coincidence. Like the programme itself, their partnership exemplifies the best practices in customer-centricity.

Finally, as in all good partnerships, the benefits are two-way. “Wolfgang’s passion for customer-centricity is contagious,” says one **ENGIE** participant. And for **INSEAD**, working with a world leader in carbon reduction is a chance to put its philosophy of business as a force for good into action. As Wolfgang puts it, “Opportunities like this don’t come along every day.”





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