

Osram Sylvania and executive education forge a long, fruitful alliance.

In 1998 Roger Myers signed up for the executive education custom program that the Johnson School had designed with Myers's employer, leading lighting manufacturer Osram Sylvania. He didn't know back then that he would be one of the first of 180 Osram Sylvania alumni to complete the program. Nor did he know



that he was helping initiate a relationship between his company and the Johnson School that would continue to benefit both partners for many years.

The program, says Prof. Joseph Thomas, associate dean for academic affairs, basically takes the Johnson School MBA value proposition—combining rigorous academic training with relevant, real-world material—and tailors it to the specific needs of the Osram Sylvania executive participants. For example, since the company is a huge manufacturing organization, the course designers focused the curriculum on manufacturing.

Called the Manufacturing Management Institute (MMI), the program

aimed to develop promising employees for leadership positions, primarily as plant managers. The idea was to take thirty-five employees from various parts of the organization and from Osram GmbH, the company's parent organization, to meet off-site for four

The Right Relationship

one-week modules spread across eight months. They would exchange best practices and learn from Johnson School faculty members and company executives about manufacturing, business, and their own company.

In addition, Sylvania had recently been acquired by Osram GmbH and was undergoing the challenges attendant on integration. "We were looking for a vehicle to reinforce that integration and make the transition," says Randy Drummond, then head of human resources development for Osram Sylvania and a major architect of the program.

Previously the company had participated with another school in another program, which, while offering good academic training in leadership and general management, lacked strong manufacturing course work and material directly relevant to the company's needs. Moreover, Osram Sylvania (which currently also partners in a custom program with another school)

felt that the earlier program wasn't participatory enough. "We knew this should be a fifty-fifty project," explains Drummond. "And we knew the Johnson School would be responsive."

Developing the Program

Drummond and his colleagues worked closely with the Johnson School for several months to develop

a program that would help Osram Sylvania employees learn

more about their company through hands-on projects and course work. Thomas, Prof. Richard Conway, senior lecturer Jan Suwinski, and associate dean Michael Hostetler visited five Osram Sylvania plant sites and interviewed more than sixty executives and managers from engineering, research and development, marketing, human resources, finance and accounting, logistics, information technology, and manufacturing.

The success of a custom program, says Thomas, depends heavily on the client's close involvement. "The client has specific outcomes in mind and is an integral and direct part of the design process." To make the connection even stronger, the program developers planned for significant portions of the course work to be taught by Osram Sylvania executives.

The students themselves were also an important source of material. "When you have an executive audience," explains Thomas, "you want to



PHOTOS BY FRANK DIMEO / CU

draw their experience out of them and allow them to teach each other. The instructor brings material and knowledge to the classroom but also uses the students' own capabilities."

The MMI program, says Thomas, allows participants a refreshing change of pace. "They get an opportunity to think more broadly and long-term than they can in their usual work environment. On the job there are meetings, questions, fires to fight, and at the end of the day, you ask, 'What happened?'" Bringing them off-site for a week devoted to learning, he adds, gives them a chance to step back and think about the big picture for their organization.

Beginning with leadership-style assessment and team-building topics, the course explores such subjects as specific manufacturing tools, communication strategies, financial analysis, supply chain management, and corporate strategy. Participants also work on large team projects that are directly relevant to their employer.

"I call it a mini-MBA, but it's specific to the company," says Ronald Steben, plant manager at Osram Sylvania's facility in Drummondville, Quebec, who attended in 2001. "The whole organization of the program, the topics, the people, the presenters from the company and from the school—we were learning from the best."

The format of four one-week sessions separated by several weeks works well, adds Myers. "You get to interact, learn some material, go back and apply it or think about it some more, come back together as a group, and bounce questions or concerns off your colleagues."

The results have been promising. "The organization is convinced that the program has had a big impact on their entire operations," says Hostetler. "They feel they're making

The format of four one-week sessions separated by several weeks works well. "You interact, learn some material, apply it, come back together, and bounce questions off your colleagues."

Osram Sylvania's Roger Myers (in gray sweat-shirt) was one of the managerial participants in the company's executive education program at the Johnson School. He went on to earn a full executive MBA in 2001 from the school.

better decisions.” In addition to seeing a significant number of MMI alumni move upward in the organization, Osram Sylvania reports much lower turnover rates for program participants than for their company peers.

Making Connections

“I’ve been with Sylvania for eighteen years now, and I’ve had a lot of continuing education opportunities over the years, but this was more intense and particularly interesting,” points

out Myers, explaining that the company has a strong commitment to continuing education and participates in many corporate seminars and other programs.

What might come as a surprise to the casual observer is that many MMI alumni named networking as the program’s number-one benefit. On

reflection, however, that makes sense. Without the program, participants would probably never meet, much less work with, such a broad variety of co-workers from different parts of the organization and parent company. And while they have a strong point of commonality—their employer—they represent a huge diversity of work styles, best practices, ideas, and experience.

“I didn’t expect to become a financial whiz or rise to the top of the organization after four weeks of the program,” says Cheryl Homan, senior human resources manager for Osram Sylvania. “But what I expected, and

got, was a great opportunity to meet and network with people in other manufacturing locations, headquarters, and disciplines.” (Despite not becoming a financial whiz, Homan confesses that she learned from Prof. Mark Nelson a lot more of the financial material than she had expected.)

As far as introducing her to a wide range of people, Homan points out that her class included participants from Canada, Germany, Mexico, and Thailand. It also more included more women than the previous year’s class, thanks largely to an observation that Thomas’s wife had made. The earlier class, all male, had visited the Thomases’ home for dinner. “Joe Thomas’s wife,” says Homan, “who introduced herself to each participant, commented that there were no women in the class.” That sparked a big change; the following year seven of the thirty-five participants were women.

Another benefit to participants was being able to hear senior management’s visions for the company firsthand. “Knowing the philosophy of the top executives for the future of the company was pretty interesting,” says Steben. “Before you meet with these guys, you have some perception of where the company is going, but when you hear from the top, you can connect all the dots.”

Getting to Know Us

One of the highlights of the program, says Homan, was the leadership-style and personality assessments during the first module. “Because of my background in education and human resources, I was familiar with the assessment tools,” she says. “However, my classmates and I agreed that regardless

of our areas of expertise, during the program our negotiating and communications skills improved greatly.”

Myers concurs. “The first week of the program, which is almost identical to the first week of the Executive MBA Program, was fantastic. It’s an opportunity to learn about yourself and your colleagues and how to build an organizational structure with people having varied skills and talents to support the business—not an organizational structure with people just like you.”

Given the type of self-discovery and personal interaction fostered by the Myers Briggs Type Indicator and similar tools, it’s no wonder many new friendships sprang up as a result of the program. “Someone I met there is one of the people I now respect most in the organization,” says Homan. “I’ve been able to advise this person in successful career choices that have benefited both the individual and the organization.”

“As a matter of fact,” says Steben, “my group concluded that we wanted to have an alumni reunion in a few years. The barriers have been broken, and everyone knows each other. Regardless of where we are in three years, a reunion will renew our networking.”

Even on an everyday basis, the broken barriers have benefited participants’ informal networking efforts. “We developed an unprecedented worldwide network,” says Steben. “If I need guidance or advice or answers, I can just call one of my peers from the class.”

The added visibility from attending the program doesn’t hurt either. “People

hear your comments and opinions in class, and they remember you,” says Homan. “Someday one of your former classmates might have an opening at his or her facility for someone with your expertise and call you up and say, ‘I have an opening. Are you interested?’”

From the other side of the fence, Johnson School representatives get to do some fruitful networking too. “This is an opportunity to interact with senior managers and find out what’s important to them right now,” explains Thomas. Participants can yield all sorts of useful information, from feedback on course work to case studies for the MBA curriculum to possible research topics. “We’ve also run student projects with these folks,” Thomas says. “We take students to their plants to analyze problems. Professor Nelson has even been able to review their financial reports.”

The longer the Johnson School works with Osram Sylvania, Thomas adds, the stronger the relationship. “The nice thing about dealing with one company for several years is that you learn a lot about that company. You begin to speak their language, anticipate problems they’ll bring, and connect in new ways.”

One particularly strong connection was made in the case of Myers, who returned to the Johnson School a year later to work on an Executive MBA. “I’d always wanted to get my MBA,” he explains, “but that was challenging with my travel schedule.” After finishing the MMI program, Myers began shopping for MBA opportunities. “I live in New Hampshire, and I was originally thinking of something local,

but then I found out that the Johnson School offered an EMBA. My company was incredibly supportive, and I signed up for it, probably not knowing what I was getting into!”

While working on the degree, Myers says, his travel schedule didn’t let up for a second. During the second year of the EMBA, for example, he made five trips to China. Taking care of business also included raising a teenage daughter. “It was time-intensive but worthwhile,” says Myers. “You just manage the process.” The curriculum, he adds, included a significant international component, which he has since found helpful in his work.

In addition, the EMBA helped Myers move into a new position. In summer 2001 Myers moved from his position as manager of manufacturing integration to become Osram Sylvania’s director of internal audit. Myers, who is not a CPA, says that the role takes advantage of his strong background in manufacturing operations as well as the financial skills and capabilities he gained while earning the EMBA.

Going Global

In October 2002, after running MMI successfully for four years, the Johnson School launched a new program with its Osram Sylvania partners. “Our business is changing, so the program needed changing as well,” says Bill Franz, director of education and training at Osram Sylvania. The new direction: a more global approach. “Globalization hasn’t always been the case for us,” he explains. “But now virtually all our business units have a global market structure.”

Whereas previous participants came largely from NAFTA-based Osram Sylvania rather than from the parent organization, says Franz, the plan is to shift to a fifty-fifty mix. In addition, class size will shrink from thirty-five to twenty-four, allowing for closer interaction and better participation. And team projects will be given heavier emphasis than before.

The new global program, says Hostetler, takes advantage of the Johnson School’s technological tools, such as CJ Online, to help participants receive information on a timely basis and communicate easily with each other and the faculty. Courses are taught not only in Ithaca but in Europe as well. And since one emphasis of the course is doing business in emerging countries, the program includes a plant tour in the Czech Republic. Moreover, the increased diversity of the participants, says Thomas, can lead only to improvements. “It’s a global economy,” he says.

The global executive education program, with its invaluable ability to get people with varied capabilities and backgrounds working together, talking, and exchanging ideas, will no doubt yield solid results, like its predecessor. “The biggest challenge in working internationally is understanding the human element of business,” says Myers. “It’s all about understanding relationships.” ■

The broken barriers have benefited participants’ informal networking. “We developed a worldwide network. If I need guidance or answers, I can just call one of my peers from the class.”