



## INSEAD

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**Essay 1:** Give a candid description of yourself (who are you as a person), stressing the personal characteristics you feel to be your strengths and weaknesses and the main factors which have influenced your personal development, giving examples when necessary. (600 words max.)

**Essay 2:** Describe the achievement of which you are most proud and explain why. In addition, describe a situation where you failed. How did these experiences impact your relationships with others? Comment on what you learned. (400 words max.)

**Essay 3:** Tell us about an experience where you were significantly impacted by cultural diversity, in a positive or negative way. (300 words max.)

**Essay 4:** Describe all types of extra-professional activities in which you have been or are still involved for a significant amount of time (clubs, sports, music, arts, politics, etc.). How are you enriched by these activities? (300 words max.)

**Essay 5:** Is there anything else that was not covered in your application that you would like to share with the Admissions Committee? (300 words max.)

**Job Essay 1:** Briefly summarise your current (or most recent) job, including the nature of work, major responsibilities, and where relevant, employees under your supervision, size of budget, clients/products and results achieved. (short answer)

**Job Essay 2:** What would be your next step in terms of position if you were to remain in the same company? (short answer)

**Job Essay 3:** Please give a full description of your career since graduating from university. Describe your career path with the rationale behind your choices. (short answer)

**Job Essay 4:** Discuss your short and long term career aspirations with or without an MBA from INSEAD. (short answer)

**Optional Job Essay:** If you are currently not working or if you plan to leave your current employer more than 2 months before the programme starts, please explain your activities and occupations between leaving your job and the start of the programme.

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## Sophia

**Essay 1: Give a candid description of yourself (who are you as a person), stressing the personal characteristics you feel to be your strengths and weaknesses and the main factors which have influenced your personal development, giving examples when necessary. (600 words max.)**

When I look back, several experiences come to my mind, generating reflections about their consequences in my current life. I believe that personal values shape our perspectives and determine how we act in the world. Personal experiences and people influences revealed my two evident strengths: Competitiveness and Honor.

Pursuit of education has forced - or encouraged - people in my family to take action, resorting to courage in order to succeed. I am proud to have a father who changed his status quo. Unlike his family and friends, he chose to leave his small village and turn his life around by attending high school in a neighbor, bigger city. Later, going back and forth, he spent four years traveling every day to the capital to continue to study. Through this sacrifice, he became the first in the entire family and the only among seven children to have a college degree. During my childhood, I witnessed the harsh reality surrounding the population in the countryside town where my dad was a manager of the only local bank. I was about six when my mother explained "social development": the bank where dad worked was state-owned and provided small farmers with loans. Gradually, my parents made me understand that my own development would be through education, so I started traveling to a bigger city to attend a private more demanding school. Meanwhile I could observe in my hometown that little education prevented people from getting decent jobs and that the uneducated parents would not bother to send their own children to school. Years later, following my dad's example, I would miss my many childhood friends when I decided to move to the big city, hundreds of miles away. I was determined to attend a good college. Pursuing my own education, I arrived alone in Sao Paulo and was admitted to the top business school in Latin America.

In order to take the best out of professional and personal activities, I rely on people. Outside work, I have always been lucky to count on my father and on grandmother's support. Since my parents' divorce when I was three, I remember little about my mother. Raised by my grandmother, I was emotionally affected last year when she was diagnosed with cancer. My father and I took turns sleeping with her at the hospital. Although I felt exhausted, at each little improvement in her condition, I found the motivation to spend the day working at the firm's client. That was when I learned best how to prioritize and delegate tasks so that my team and I could be productive. And I am grateful to my team members, for their collaborative attitude did not let me give up. My grandmother's disease made me deeply concerned but at the same time happy to know that I had built solid friendship at my consulting firm. Gradually, my grandmother's health deteriorated and I spent more time with her. Everyone from the firm did all they could to help me change my appointments; a few colleagues offered to replace me in some meetings. Two of them even came to the hospital a few times so that we could finish an important presentation. Thanks for my friends' support I did not have to leave my grandmother alone and I was with her until her last days, four months later. Surprisingly, at the end of this period, I received my best performance feedback ever.

Regarding weakness, I need to make a conscious effort to stop and listen to others before charging ahead with my own idea and avoid acting domineering. My impersonal approach to business life leaves little time, tolerance, or compassion for emotions, even my own. I may resist changing a decision once I have made it. I need to learn to understand the seemingly "illogical" feelings of others, and accept that they are rational and valid.

I believe that what I have already done in life says much about my personal values.



**Essay 2: Describe the achievement of which you are most proud and explain why. In addition, describe a situation where you failed. How did these experiences impact your relationships with others? Comment on what you learned. (400 words max.)**

My leadership style is strategic-oriented with a vision and direction that are plan fully executed and problem focused. I excel at directing others in reaching the goals dictated by my strong vision of the group and thrive on marshaling forces to get plans put into action. The journey towards effective leadership is not always easy.

In a professional environment filled with pressure over time and with a lack of group identity, team members feel alienated. From day one at XXX (my consulting firm), I did what I could to be staffed in an engagement with the challenge of changing the client's perspective about his own business. I had a mission: change the perception of managers about their company's investment portfolio. I had to transform the way managers saw investments: from "my project" to "company's projects." All I had a complex tool developed inside XXX (my consulting firm): "XXX Methodology"; but that is not enough when "changing minds" is on table. I faced several initial resistances from the project managers in adopting our new investment prioritization process. However, the reason for such resistance was deeper and I had to learn to identify the motivations and overcome conflicting interests. Perseverant and patient, I listened to his worries, understood his reasons for not cooperating, and finally realized what aspects of his mentality needed to be changed. He was too concerned about losing what he considered his best investments. I was determined to make him realize that his projects might not be the best for the company. Through this experience, I was able to persuade the managers and change the organization's misconception regarding investments. I realized that there is often an abyss between the way an employee considers the company and the way the company sees individuals. After this event, I grew savvy about how an adequate organizational structure can narrow this abyss.

Community activities, besides allowing me to give back to society, which enabled me to attend a top public (free) university, has yielded quite a few takeaways. In one of such occasions, I prevented a couple of hundred teenagers from enjoying some specific benefits. In this kind of competition run by XXX, various NGOs should develop business plans for social projects and the best plans would be awarded prizes to fund their projects. Brazilian students from all colleges participate by supporting those NGO's. The NGO to which I was assigned aimed at making an organization self-sustainable. As the leader of our group, I was eager to explore my peers' innovative ideas. Establishing a collaborative atmosphere, we analyzed the company properly and found feasible solutions to make its funding possible. However, I was so busy with academic duties, search for internships, and other activities that I stopped devoting to the NGO project. I mistakenly assumed that my team members would work with autonomy. I believe that another factor might have gotten in the way of plan execution: I did not bother to adapt my communication to the different profiles of my team members.



**Essay 3:** Tell us about an experience where you were significantly impacted by cultural diversity, in a positive or negative way. (300 words max.)

From day one at XXX, I made it clear that I wanted to join engagements abroad. During a short two-week intense consulting assignment in Turkey I had a culture shock.

Passionate about traveling, I always study the place I will visit, so I can fully enjoy it. So, before flying to Turkey, I read "Istanbul" (Orhan Pamuk). I like to say that when I travel I am not a mere tourist. Thus, before my consulting assignment, I was careful to read a book on business etiquette in several different countries. I would have no further surprises after studying that book. But I was wrong. In Istanbul, we were offered some local "candy", which I ate even though I was not willing to have that "experience", but my manager politely refused it. For some reason, I knew that accepting that offer was "the right thing to do." During the presentation, none of our questions was answered accordingly while the general atmosphere felt somewhat tense. I could not understand that situation. I needed to find out the reason for that attitude, but no one was willing to explain. The insights about Turkey from Pamuk's book should have helped me. Later, during lunch, I shared with the group how much I had learned about Istanbul with that wonderful story and the author's report of his development in that city in the 1950's. I had broken the ice. Recognizing my honest concern about the peculiarity of their habits, Mr. Halil finally helped me understand my culture shock: it is customary in Turkey to trust only people who eat their food.

When the team members have different profiles from mine, I must learn and practice empathic listening skills - I must first understand how one thinks and feels so that I can influence them.



**Essay 4:** Describe all types of extra-professional activities in which you have been or are still involved for a significant amount of time (clubs, sports, music, arts, politics, etc.). How are you enriched by these activities? (300 words max.)

I have got myself involved with initiatives that enriched my personality. The following episodes showed me the value of understanding and taking advantage of people's strengths.

As someone attracted to the practice of sports, I would not easily accept the fact that my college lacked structured sports activities. I invited a couple of classmates to build a sports and recreation department at XXX. The first imperative move was to gather supporters. Management agreed to let us use a small room that we turned into an office. Now we needed to fix the old courts or no one would be able to practice sports. Once we started seeking sponsors, we also promoted our idea and, in this way, found collaborators. For six months, I devoted three days a week to making my dream come true and never once did I fail to deliver my academic tasks. I felt the rewards of our efforts when we finally had one male and one female team for each sport - basketball, volleyball and handball. Equally fulfilling was to motivate the players to seek sponsors for equipment and uniforms.

I also looked for initiatives aligned with my personal values. I chose XXX, the prep course for college entrance tests that our school held. XXX had 50 volunteers and operated in the evening in a private school building who lent a few classrooms. The lack of physical space was the biggest constraint for us to cope with the demand of 250+ students every year. As a teacher for one year and a marketing director for another, I had listened a lot and spoken little, and I felt ready to contribute. I set a simple vision: in one year, we should raise enough money to build a school with double the capacity. By the end of the year, having convinced private sponsors to support our mission, we had met our target and the school was built over the following year.

Currently I belong to a group that supports an underprivileged community in Sao Paulo, where I help prepare and distribute food. I also participate in XXX's Youth Social Entrepreneurial Program, in which I am a panelist for evaluating action plans and approving financing of young social entrepreneurs' projects.



**Essay 5: Is there anything else that was not covered in your application that you would like to share with the Admissions Committee? (300 words max.)**

Besides the one-year curriculum itself and the students' diversity, the opportunity to experiment with intense mind-blowing experiences while opening the door to an international career made my choice for **INSEAD** even more obvious.

When people learn that I am half Italian/half Spaniard, they often ask me "Why France, then?"

Even though few Brazilians speak French, there is a national consensus about the beauty of the French language, more than any other, given its melody and the supposed glamour that comes with it. Also, my grandmother used to be a French teacher. Although she has never given me classes, the little she spoke occasionally was enough for me to find it charming.

After I lived in France for a year, my enthusiasm for the country only grew. I have always liked French culinary in general, from what I knew of French bistros in Brazil, but mostly, I had this passion for Brie, Camembert, and Brioche. What I couldn't imagine was how different (and better) the real French ones could be from those I ate in Brazil; and how marveled I would be to get to know all the other kinds of cheese, bread, and delicious typical dishes and desserts. Wines, particularly, have a special meaning to me because it was in France that I learned to drink and appreciate the beverage.

Simplicity is a good path to happiness. I learned that a good meal, tasty wine, and loyal friends can be the ultimate stage of happiness. I also became more open and curious about other people's lives and cultures not to mention aware of my own self.



**JOB ESSAY 1:** Briefly summarise your current (or most recent) job, including the nature of work, major responsibilities, and where relevant, employees under your supervision, size of budget, clients/products and results achieved. (short answer)

As an analyst at XXX, I must identify and analyze issues, develop recommendations, and achieve results through teamwork. This third requirement is my favorite: conquering partners' trust I am working with more autonomy and strengthen my relationship even with senior clients.

In the last two years, I have helped an innovative Brazilian XXX manufacturer grow into a major force in the industry. This client's went from US\$400M revenues and US\$65M profit to US\$1B revenues and US\$300M profit in three years. Supporting this client to build their brand's new value proposition, map their footprint full potential and design their M&A strategy has been amazing. For instance, after identifying new sales points using different information sources, analysis and field visits, I helped the manager convince franchisees to open 135 new stores, generating US\$40M in profits in 2002. Beyond building models, I must understand business reality. I resorted to war stories to engage the client CEO into discussions and thus improve the impact of our recommendation. Also, adapting to the client's people driven culture and developing great relationship, have greatly contributed to my professional development and earned me visibility at XXX.

I have also teamed up with Sydney office of XXX to develop a go-to-market strategy for a consumer goods company and with four other XXX teams located in Europe, Asia, and US, delivering a unique perspective on the Brazilian professional services market to an American private equity fund.

More recently I have designed a commercial entry strategy for a Japanese cosmetics company. I was the only full-time XXX consultant on the ground working directly with seven main clients and responsible for data gathering, structuring, running analysis, and managing client relationship daily. I learned to manage client anxiety about results and prioritize their requests. After putting a bit of extra hours and building a trust-based relationship, I turned the project into success; the client continues calling me for advice 8 months after project end.

I have faced different challenges and explored my main motivation ingredient: people. Nothing amuses me more than listening from a 45-year-old client that "If I had received your feedbacks twenty years ago, maybe my career would be at another level." Mentoring and motivating, I have established and cultivated healthy good relationships with clients and conquered the confidence to perform more complex projects.

**JOB ESSAY 2:** What would be your next step in terms of position if you were to remain in the same company? (short answer)

Upon graduation I am expected to return to XXX as an XXX. Later, leading increasingly complex projects, I will pursue the position of XXX.



**JOB ESSAY 3:** Please give a full description of your career since graduating from university. Describe your career path with the rationale behind your choices. (short answer)

I've nurtured a career path that values professionals who know how to articulate individual actions with collective efforts. My intention is to grow into a leader who can transform and apply social behaviors in order to foster a more sustainable work environment. Through the **INSEAD MBA**, I can prepare myself to accomplish my goal after 3-4 years at XXX: lead a consumer goods company with a strong sense of purpose.

When I entered college, I strongly believed that my professional success would depend exclusively on my effort, and analytical capacity. Everything happened in France when I did my research on Institute of Robotics at the French Aerospace Center. Science and technology thrilled me with intellectual challenges. Research demanded sophisticated analyses, but did not allow me to synthesize impactful end-product solutions. In a discussion with a professor on a technical detail, I suddenly had a breakthrough moment: "I could not spend my life in that lab discussing what only two or three technicians in the entire country could understand. I need to insert the people factor in my professional life." I came back to Brazil and joined a Big-4 management consulting firm.

Acting temporarily as a post-MBA associate in one specific assignment, I realized that there is so much regarding leadership that I must still learn. As a consultant, I have to learn about balancing the work and life pressures. In this specific engagement, I realized that I got completely lost as I attempted to balance my personal life with a scenario that was testing my skills and resistance. In my three years of consulting, I have seen many directors get divorced; partners that miss their children's birthday celebrations; I even witnessed one of my mentors having a crisis of identity. These are not inspiring leaders. Since I was responsible for one analyst, I felt frustrated to perceive that I could not change his resistance to my leadership style. I realized that leadership is quite complex. I started to read about everything related to that subject and, mainly, I try to be involved in every possible leadership opportunity in my XXX.

**JOB ESSAY 4:** Discuss your short and long term career aspirations with or without an MBA from INSEAD. (short answer)

My intention is to grow into a leader who can transform and apply social behaviors in order to foster a more sustainable work environment. One project for a consumer goods company had me question the direct influence that these goods can have on people's routine and, in that way, change people's social behavior. Not many managers thoroughly understand social and environmental issues that are necessary to break conventional approaches of value creation, nor do they seek to explore and improve this field.