

Sustainable Innovation Portrait

Marwa Mohamed, Human Resources, India, Middle East and Africa

Marwa Mohamed, Regional Manager for Talent, Leadership & Learning in India, Middle East and Africa, explains how the Henkel Innovation Challenge encourages students and Henkel employees alike to think creatively about the world in 2050.

Marwa, tell us about the Henkel Innovation Challenge (HIC).

The HIC is an international student competition. Every year teams of two students are invited to come up with new concepts for a Henkel brand or technology in the year 2050.

The best teams are invited to present their ideas to a jury of Henkel business managers in a national or regional final. Of those, the top teams then advance to the international competition.

The top three teams overall receive prizes (e.g. an around-the-world-ticket with a value of 10,000 euros) and are invited to attend a meeting with Henkel CEO Kasper Rorsted.

It is an important tool for Henkel in terms of attracting the best young talent. **Students get to experience professional life at Henkel, apply what they are learning in the classroom and find out what it is like working for a multinational company.**

How was the idea for this program first developed?

The HIC started in 2007 as a way to connect with students and position Henkel as an employer of choice.

It has grown significantly since then. This past year students from 30 different countries were invited to submit innovative and sustainable concepts for Henkel's seventh HIC. In our region alone, this competition included students from Egypt, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, India, Tunisia and Turkey.

The HIC kicks off for the eighth time this fall, and we will expand to Algeria for the first time.

How does the program benefit Henkel?

First and foremost, the HIC serves as a recruiting and employer branding tool for our company. This is particularly important in regions like India, Middle East and Africa, where the competition for top talent is getting more intense.

Thanks to the HIC, we can develop personal relationships with promising young people at an early stage in their professional development. In fact, we have gone on to hire HIC participants as both employees and interns, after getting to know them through the competition.

Second, Henkel employees serve as both mentors and judges for the HIC. So working with the students can give our employees new ideas and perspectives on challenges they are facing at work.

Have there been any participants who have focused on sustainability issues?

Of course. As part of the application process, we encourage the students to consider how their idea contributes to sustainability. How do their innovations relate to Henkel's six sustainability focal areas? What is the impact along the entire value chain?

This past year Henkel awarded third place to Mayank Nandwani and Geetika Goel, a team from Delhi in India, who developed a sustainable surface coating called "eCoat", which will be used in the automotive industry.

I was so impressed with their concept, because they didn't shy away from the inherent complexities of sustainability and our Adhesive Technologies business. They really embraced the challenge. As a result, their concept was well received by both the Henkel mentors and judges.

What advice on innovative thinking can you share with others?

Innovation does not necessarily mean new technologies or brands. When I think about innovation, I think about changing mindsets. Sometimes we just need to think creatively to find the most efficient and effective solution to the problem standing in front of us.

With that in mind, my advice is to seek out new experiences and perspectives. Doing so will unlock your ability to think in creative ways.