Creativity, innovation, quick turnaround, flexibility, hard work, and an eye on the future are hallmarks of the Brazilian management style. Brazil is a young country, with great resources and a dynamic, multiracial society which firmly believes in building a better future. Local companies have achieved global leadership in diverse industries such as aircraft manufacture, renewable ethanol fuels, agricultural production, forestry management, mining, food and beverage, among others.

FIA Business School has graduated CEOs and business leaders in each of these industries, and has studied their management practices. These represent a particularly Brazilian brand of management, integrating creative strategies, innovative use of technology and resources, flexibility and social consciousness.

Somewhat surprisingly, the fun-loving Brazilians work long hours; rigorous project management, attention to detail, focus on objectives, hard work and perspiration are important elements in the success of outstanding companies like EMBRAER, the world leader in regional aircraft, VALE, possibly the most efficient mining company in the world, and AMBEV, global leader in the beer industry. All this achieved in a volatile economic environment, with poor transport infrastructure and an inefficient, regulation-bound and slow moving government bureaucracy.

This difficult context makes Brazil into a demanding testing ground for managers and for management techniques. Arguably, a couple of years in the country equates into five years of management experience in a stable economy, as new challenges, changes in economic outlook, opportunities and legal frameworks evolve at breakneck speed. Profuturo-FIA, a Future Studies Centre, was created in 1980 to study economic, social and technological trends, starting with a study of the future of fuel ethanol in Brazil.

As Brazil opened up its economy in the 1990’s, Brazilian managers needed to change gears, moving from making easy money with clever cashflow management in hyper-inflationary times, when consumer prices changed every
Realising this need, FIA launched the first Executive MBA in Brazil, with international standards but a distinctly Brazilian flavour. The objective was to provide executives with modern management tools, coupled with a global outlook and social responsibility. A first innovation turned the traditional MBA head over heels; instead of starting with core subjects like accounting, statistics or marketing, it begins with in-depth analysis of the socio-economic and strategic challenges in a volatile business environment. With a clear vision of companies’ mission and role in society, as well as the requirement to create superior returns to shareholders, the subsequent courses focus on leading company-wide transformations to achieve sustainable strategic leadership.

Sustainable leadership requires a strong emphasis on business ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility, taught in the Executive MBA since 1993. This has created lasting commitment to social causes by the Alumni Association, whose primary goal is to give back to society by applying management expertise to charitable NGOs. More than one thousand volunteer MBAs have trained hundreds of NGOs in business practices, and teaching materials have been provided to 17 countries.

From the outset, reversing the traditional flow of original management thought from more developed centres. Dr James Wright, Associate Dean for Research at FIA, published in 1984 the first scenarios and models that called for companies to create ‘Basic Products’ specifically designed for low income consumers in emerging markets. This approach later became internationally accepted through CK Prahalad’s 2005 bestseller *The Wealth at the Bottom of the Pyramid*. Professor Renata Spers of FIA followed up, analysing worth five years of financial data that showed, for the first time ever, that companies that served low income groups grew more and were more lucrative than firms that focused primarily on high income markets in Brazil.

In another innovative line of research, Professor Alfredo Behrens, studies how Brazilian samba clubs put on one of the world’s grandest and most creative spectacles, the carnival parades. Each club, with up to four thousand members, competes with a rigorously orchestrated, perfectly timed one hour extravaganza of creative costumes, choreographed dances, imaginative floats, and a different story line. Poorly educated but highly motivated people, work hard for a full year to roll out, precisely on schedule, a completely new show, in an amazing project management feat.

Gaining a global outlook is a key part of management development, so since 1995 FIA Executive MBA graduates take at least two international study trips. Every year regular study trips go to the USA, UK, France, China, India, Dubai, Mexico and Canada. This is a truly international learning experience, which is materialised in comparative studies, seminars and business plans presented on their return to Brazil.

Integrating best practices across different business schools, the Americas MBA for Executives is a joint program between partner schools ITAM in Mexico, Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada, Vanderbilt University in the USA and FIA in Brazil. Students from all four schools study the core subjects at their home university in the first part of the program, and then meet in four intensive nine day immersions in each country, to study and learn about each other's business culture. They conduct a real consulting project over a final six month period, putting into practice what they have learned in multicultural teams, often working at a distance, as so executives do today in international firms. This programme has shown itself to be a wonderful cross-cultural learning experience, as well as a very cost and time effective format.

These initiatives has allowed FIA to be the first South American school to effectively attract a class of full time MBA students from Europe and the USA, who come to Brazil to study in English and learn about management with a Brazilian flavour. In this way, FIA feels that it is helping to develop not only capable managers, who are making companies in Brazil more competitive, but preparing international executives who will work together to bring effective and concrete contributions to a better world.

Contact information: [www.fia.com.br/internationalmba](http://www.fia.com.br/internationalmba)