Nikhil Mahen and His Work as a William J. Clinton Fellow at American India Foundation

By Shreevaishnavi Venugopalan

A William J. Clinton Fellow at American India Foundation, Nikhil Mahen works with Aravind Eye Hospital in India. The fellowship is helping to shape the next generation of leaders committed to impactful change while also strengthening civil society to be more efficient and effective. A 2008 MEM graduate from Duke, Nikhil worked as an Analyst with Deutsche Bank for four years. He then worked with Instillmotion Consulting Pvt. Ltd in India as an Innovation Consultant, where he travelled across India meeting a lot of entrepreneurs to explore a career in innovation.

“Hello, Nikhil. How have you been?”

“I’m doing good. How can I help you today?”

“It would be great if you could share your experience from MEM, Deutsche Bank, and the William J. Clinton Fellowship at American India Foundation to give the current students a perspective.”

“Sure, I’d be glad to share.”

“What were the key skill sets that Duke MEM offered you?”

“MEM was great. It gave me a different perspective as to where my skill sets could be used. It broadened the kind of problems I could solve and the industries I could explore. It gave me permission to think beyond what I knew. The program was flexible and made me realize that there existed things I didn’t know. This helped me learn and look out for opportunities.”

“How important is it to have a sound background in finance to succeed as a Business Analyst in an investment bank?”

“It’s advantageous to know the financial services terms and products. It also largely depends on the type of role one does, such as back office roles which might not demand deep knowledge in finance versus a front-end client-facing role. Also, you should be interested in the core business of the company as that brings out passion for work.”

“What does a typical day look like for a Business Analyst at Deutsche Bank?”

“There is no one typical day for a business analyst. A typical day can be defined for a support analyst. For a business analyst, I could define it in terms of the timeline of a project. Typically, a group comes to you with a problem and you will
interview the stakeholders involved such as the people in the upstream, downstream, and the direct users of the system to understand their requirements. After obtaining requirements, you would do a gap analysis basis the resource in hand. You would work with system designers and architects to design the system to come up with the basic system. There is a review at every step, such as the requirement gathered. The product is tested at multiple levels, such as the developer testing and user testing.

“While working as a Business Analyst, what were the most valuable skills you used?”

“Being engineers and having pursued MEM, we all have the analytical skills required for the job. The most valuable skills are not the tangible skills but the soft skills. People management is very important. Managing time and project timeline is important but isn’t too difficult. Patience plays an important role as the requirements need to be gathered from various sources and different levels. Understanding the time constraints of the other teams helps plan the project better. Good analytical skills, paying attention, and taking notes are generic skills that would be required at this role.”

“What do you see yourself doing after 5 years?”

“I spent a major part of my 20’s planning my future and I did not enjoy spending a lot of time planning my next step. I’m not sure what I would be doing 5 years from now. I hope to be doing something cool.”

“The fellowship is selective and recruits candidates from India and USA and places them in projects with particular organizations based on the skill set of the candidate.