

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

Deutsche Bank



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MEMP Alumnus
2008

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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

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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.”

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.

“While we speak of generic or technical skills, which course in MEM helped you acquire the skill set required for the role?”

“There were different things I took from the various courses such as Decision Models and Marketing. One should aim to take away various things from the coursework that come together to impact the way one thinks. Courses such as Project Management helped me get better at problem solving.”

“What motivated you to look at a career in innovation?”

“I enjoy success stories, and stories of hard work. I like coming up with ideas which change the way things work, which adds value to the society or even a single individual. Anything new interests me. I enjoy problem solving innately. The more complicated the problem, the more I enjoy it.”

“Could you tell me more about the fellowship you are pursuing currently?”

“American India Foundations runs a 10 month long fellowship by the name of William J. Clinton for services in India. 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. They work with organizations in healthcare, social enterprises, and the education

sector. I am currently in a small city called Madurai working with Aravind Eye hospital which is one of the largest eye care innovation centers in the world. I am currently working on a project which is between a finance and a strategy role wherein I am helping them design a decision making system for greater financial sustainability.”

“What would you advice someone looking at a Business Analyst and similar roles in the banking sector?”

“Speak to people who are business analysts. Getting different people’s perspectives about the sector would help understand their kind of work. Researching both online and talking to people is the key. Make sure you speak to Business analysts who are 1 year, 2 years, 3 years, 4 years into the system as this would provide insight about the work at different levels and the scope of growth. Don’t jump into an industry without thorough background research.”

“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.”

“It was great talking to you. I’m sure your insight will be useful for the MEM students.”

“My pleasure, indeed. Glad I could help.” ■
