

Pragati Anand, an MBA Candidate at INSEAD, Talks About His Experience in Consulting



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An MBA Candidate at INSEAD, Pragati Anand looks at making a career in

innovation and design consulting, a niche form of consulting. He holds a bachelor's degree in Environmental Engineering from Delhi College of Engineering, India. He joined Evalueserve as a Business Analyst and grew to the position of a senior business analyst in the organization. In order to deepen his analytical skills and get introduced to business, he chose to pursue MEM at Duke. He joined Capgemini Consulting in 2008 as a consultant and grew into a senior consultant. To gain a deeper business perspective and

to pursue a career in innovation and design consulting, he chose to earn a MBA degree from INSEAD. This is also helping him experience the European educational system and create a global network.

On a Monday morning in France, Pragati is prepared for an informational interview with a representative of CDAR at MEMP Duke.

“Hello, Pragati. How have you been?” says Vaishnavi.

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

“It would be great if you could share your experience from MEM, Capgemini, and INSEAD to give the current students a perspective about Consulting.”

“Sure. I would be glad to share details that would be of help.”

“How would you describe a typical day at Capgemini Consulting?”

“I would prefer describing a consulting week as that would be more relevant. Typically the first few days of the week is spent onsite at the client’s office from eight in the morning. We attend meetings throughout the day and work on the deliverables. The client debriefing session generally takes place midweek, post which we get back and work from the home office on Thursdays and Fridays. Lunches are usually working lunches. Typically Fridays are easier unless there is a project requirement. We get to network with the employees of the home office which helps create opportunities for different projects. Three things that define the culture of Capgemini are flexibility, the “fun” element, and appreciation for being outgoing and networking. They look for people who are honest, driven, and are able to have fun while they work, with great communication and presentation skills.”

“From the way you described a consultant’s week, it sure seems work and travel intensive. What about consulting fascinates you and drives you towards pursuing a career in consulting?”

“Travel is a consulting profession requirement. There are 4 things that drive me to pursue a career in consulting: A big variety in the projects relating to different kinds of industries, the environment and complexity, the highly people based

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and communication based business, a huge learning opportunity as one gets to work with very smart people from varied backgrounds, and the option of specializing in a particular industry later on in life as one gets to explore various industries. Staffing for the first couple of projects is done by the staffing manager, who tries to match the requirements of the project with the skill set of the consultant. After the first few projects, staffing is more driven by what one wants to do and the performance on prior projects in the company.”

“What are the most valuable skill sets for a consultant?”

“Some core skills that are required based on the type of consulting and there are a set of general broad skills that will be helpful. In terms of the broad skills that any consultant should have, one is the ability to be analytical and good problem solving skills. It is important to be able to communicate correctly and convey ideas concisely and correctly. The third thing will be to have a good sense of business; just knowing numbers and frameworks may not be good enough, a sound sense of business judgment is required to make the right decision for the client. A strong learning curve is required as one needs to be able to quickly learn and become functional in an alien environment. Case interviews have to be approached structurally. This involves a lot of practice. Symbiotic exchange of doing cases with peers and giving cases to peers is helpful. Timing yourself and simulating the interview environment is important. Trying to cover 3 to 5 cases from different business problems is essential.”

“What are the biggest challenges faced by students trying to enter the field of consulting?”

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“Choice of office one wants to align with in a consulting firm is crucial as certain locations are more competitive than others. There is a difference between management consulting, technology consulting and other kinds; one has to be cognitive of the differences. In management consulting, they look for individuals who are structured, which comes with practice and experience. Very often, people are not prepared for a case interview with an interview call in hand and this could be a lost cause.”

“What are the courses of MEM that you would suggest for a student aspiring to make a career in consulting?”

“Decision Models helps deepen analytical skills and is bound to build your proficiency in Microsoft Excel. Courses which help you get more analytical and comfortable with Excel are suggested. Marketing helps one with case studies and frameworks as it gives you a place to start with in terms of frameworks. Having graduated a couple of years ago, I might not be updated with the current courses, but courses related to management and strategy are good courses to pursue.”

“I have come across a lot of people who say they didn’t feel the need to do an MBA post MEM. While you are pursuing an MBA post MEM, do you see an overlap in coursework or the structure of the program?”

“Yes and no. Yes to the extent that MEM does introduce you to the basics of business, marketing, and financial accounting. To the extent I went through MEM, it did not dwell deep into strategy, organizational behavior, and hard-core finance. There is an extra layer of academic knowledge that the MBA provides. I chose to do a one year MBA program against a 2 year program as I had a basic knowledge of business from both my job and MEM. I wanted to expand the knowledge further which this course is helping me with.”

“Having done MEM in 2 semesters, could you give me some insight into the pros and cons of doing this against doing the course in 3 semesters?”

“I landed in the United States in the beginning of August; the program began towards late August. It was quite challenging to be looking for a job in the beginning of September, not having done much in the program. Fortunately for me, I had my job with Capgemini by October, post which my MEM experience became much more fruitful. I led the MEM PDC, became much more involved in the program, and got involved in a lot of extracurricular activities. For me doing the program in 9 months made sense as I had a job to go back to.”

“That sounds great! What does your five year career plan look like?”

“Apart from consulting, I have been involved in entrepreneurial activities. I worked with the Duke Biomedical Engineering team on developing a low cost heart rate transplant at Duke, pitched for it and won the competition sponsored by Engineering World Health. I also worked on a startup with a batch mate of mine for which we got covered in the Duke Newsletter and Business Week. I would want to use my analytical skills in innovation and design, the more creative side of things. I see myself leading a creative business or having one of my own subject to how things unfold. In the short term, I see myself exploring strategy innovation and entrepreneurship.”

“Thanks a lot for sharing your experience and also throwing light on how students could make the most of their Duke experience.”

“I am glad I could help and hope this provides some guidance to students aspiring to make a career in consulting.” ■

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