

Behind the screen of Information Technology

The last decade has seen young Indian professionals making a beeline to work in the Indian IT and ITES sector. And why not? Information Technology services' companies and BPOs have the plushest offices, enviable salaries, employees are wooed like never before and provide the ultimate status symbols for Indians- an opportunity to travel and work in the first world (remember the aura attached to 'phoren' returnees and NRIs?!). People are recruited in herds these days with advertisements in local FM stations!!

This is not to divert the importance IT exports has on our forex balances, boost to employment for the teeming youth of this country, its contribution to our exchequer and the booming services' sector riding on the IT industry – hospitality, airlines, catering and retailing to name a few.

But has the country contributed by developing workable solutions or products that can be used by global companies a la Oracle or SAP or ticketing or billing solutions? There may be very few exceptions. Have you wondered why all the Indians making a mark individually have done it outside the shores of India? Why is mediocrity toasted here? Are we truly building a knowledge industry? Or are we quick to pat our backs for below average and untried and untested work?

To be fair, IT is a fledgling industry and we are still in its periphery doing low-end, non-critical work. Every industry has only gradually moved up the value chain, especially in the services sector.

Given this background what is the true value or expertise IT industries can provide to young, ambitious, aspiring MBAs? Sadly, not much in the present context. On the other hand, this can be viewed as an opportunity but only if you are an entrepreneur and not an employee beginning a career in IT. Or if your idea is to earn money at any cost in the short term without much thought to long term career plans. Tread at your own risk!!

Today most MBAs are providing sales support and creating '.ppt' solutions. They are perfecting the art of 'cutting-edge' technology or 'Cut & Paste' in computer language!! Plagiarism rules in IT as it does in almost all spheres today. Originality is at a premium. We need to change this if we are to be taken seriously worldwide not just for our low cost coding capabilities but also

someone who understands what business needs in the competitive world of today. To be a blue blood consultant and provide the client value for money, that can be the only way to be a serious player in the long term.

So what can one do to gain all the goodies that the IT industry can offer but at the same time not compromise on long term expertise? Is it worthwhile to even venture into this industry considering the deep knowledge you have gained in your professional course?

My suggestion to young MBAs is

1. Work in business operations of an old age, brick and motor industry and understand how it operates thoroughly for at least 5-7 years. Pay extra attention to the factors that affect the growth and profitability of its operations.
2. What are the internal and external factors having a bearing in its operations. Remember no IT system works for itself. It is a mere tool of a business.
3. Understand the source and role of information and data; What information/data is needed for decision making; What gives a business the competitive edge;
4. Preferably work in consulting later to hone your capabilities of quickly understanding key success elements of the client and finding a workable, efficient and effective solution which is also cost effective and has a long shelf life.
5. If after all these years you still feel you are inclined towards IT, insist on working on some critical development projects and their implementations as a Business Analyst, Subject Matter Expert or Implementation Manager.
6. Wriggle your way into creating prototypes for a particular business process. This is easier said than done at present where companies are happy mastering technical tools without understanding what value it adds to a client's business and where exactly it can be used.
7. Remember the people putting money on the table to develop IT systems are from business operations, never a technocrat, and they are keen to know what benefits the solution will have in their daily operations.
8. Develop critical thinking and do not be afraid to suggest a better solution than what the client wants. Most client feedbacks show that they are not happy with the habit of

Indian technocrats just accepting what they saying without bringing forward the drawbacks of such a solution. If a client wants a table with three legs in three corners of a square top don't hesitate to resist this saying there is no stability in this solution!!

Believe me; the above will enable all you MBAs in making a mark in not just the company you are working in but in the industry too. You will be sort after anywhere in the world and will find interesting and lucrative jobs/assignments right till the sun sets on your working life; all this at your own terms and giving you immense satisfaction. Is there anyone who does not desire such a future?

About the author

Lalitha Ravindran is a Subject Matter Expert in one of the leading IT companies. Most of her career spanning 22 years was in the insurance industry where she worked in areas covering almost the entire value chain. She is an alumna of Kousali Institute of Management Studies, KUD, of the 1983 batch. She can be reached at lalitha.ravindran@gmail.com