

# Projects to kickstart your career

**STEPPING STONE** Summer projects help you understand the practical aspects of the theoretical knowledge you've gained in institutes, writes V Pradeep Kumar

Three decades ago, after completing summer projects as part of my MBA, I had two offers on hand and didn't go through the campus placement programme. These were the companies I wanted to build my career in and hence had chosen them to do projects. As demonstrated by many students, the idea can work even now.

Summer projects are your first exposure to the corporate world and are designed to help you understand the practical aspects of theoretical knowledge imparted in institutes. However, summer projects shouldn't be done with this limited objective; instead, utilise this as a stepping stone to build a rewarding career.

However, the key question is how one should make the right choice?

Be the architect of your life by making a logical career plan, choosing the specialisation to pursue and the industry to work with. Identify the top two or three professionally managed and growth oriented companies in the chosen industry. If you have dual specialisation, let's say in marketing and finance, choose two companies where you can build either marketing or finance careers. If you need to do two projects, choose one specialisation at a time.

Check the list of companies associated with your institute. If the desired companies aren't listed, request your professors or dean to approach the companies. Another option is to see if the seniors of the institutes are already working in those companies. If nothing works, utilise your contacts or talk to the companies directly.

If you want to build your career in a particular city like Bangalore, Mumbai or Delhi, then try doing the project in the same city to get a feel of working there and start networking.

Once the project and the company are decided, how should you make the most of your choice?

**Preparation:** Research various aspects of the company, the

industry, competition and consumer preferences to gain knowledge.

**Choice of subject:** Avoid choosing 'organisational study' which, while giving you an idea of its functioning, delivers no value to the organisation. Instead, research for specific issues or challenges faced by the organisation.

Many organisations do suggest a relevant topic, in the absence of which, choose on the following lines:

■ **Marketing:** Changing consumer preferences in the industry; Effectiveness of advertising and choice of mediums

■ **Human resources:** Facilitating work-life balance; Gender issues in service industries

■ **Finance:** Fundamental analysis of real estate sector; Competitive threats from microfinance companies

■ **Services:** Benchmarking service standards; Effectiveness of IVRS

**Smart proposals:** Make smart proposals, giving the benefits of the study to the organisation. Get concurrence from your institute too.

**Resources:** Be clear what resources you require from the company and the institute. Typical resources you may require are: authorisation letter from the company to conduct research; a workstation to do your work; guidance from a designated officer; and other facilities like stipend (if applicable).

**Methodology:** Remember your long-term objective of building a career and conduct the research professionally displaying highest standards. If you are doing a survey, ensure appropriateness of the sample size. Use internet only for exploratory research and not for conclusive research.

■ **Analysis:** Examine if the data is adequate to analyse and arrive at conclusions. If not, continue the survey to get additional data. It's worth the extra effort.

■ **Conclusions:** Present the



**PROVE YOUR VALUE** Make sure your presentation is well prepared and effective.

analysis and conclusions, logically. While making conclusions, let the communication be tactful. For example, present deficiencies as 'improvement areas', and include practical suggestions.

■ **Check the veracity:** Ensure value of research,

by checking the veracity of the conclusions with your guide or mentor. Also, check how feasible your suggestions are in terms of costs. A cost-benefit analysis will therefore be valuable.

■ **Make an impactful presentation:** This is the time to prove the value of

your work to the organisation. Hence, get senior managers to be part of your audience and make a short and impactful presentation. Demonstrate your communication skills by tactfully handling questions.

A summer project is your

opportunity to get an overview of the organisation and its business model. More importantly, researching a key issue or a challenge faced by the organisation where you want to build a career, is critical.

If you are doing an MBA course, kick start your career by choosing the companies and projects intelligently.