MBAEx Business Review

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Joka Wild

CLASS OF 2023

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Know your Alum

Disha Chhabra
Product Manager, Google

Passionate about solving customer problems through products.
Nominated in the list of impactful women product leaders in Asia Pacific.

Can you kindly briefly describe your position and the kind of influence your job has?

I work as a product manager with Google maps and my role involves keeping user-generated content abuse-free and high-quality. As part of this role, I work with several teams within Google maps as well as other google product areas. Like other PM roles, this role demands a lot of influence without authority. I influence the charter of many of these partner teams I work with, for us to have a common vision and goals.

In this new Digital era, how do you think India has evolved technologically in the last few years?

India has made significant leaps in the past few years. Driven by events like demonetization, covid; our technological prowess has grown significantly. Cash is no longer the king. Even local vendors today accept digital payments. The adoption of technology across widespread use cases has seen exponential growth. Everything is now bought from the comfort of one's home with the click of a few buttons. We attract significant venture capital in our technology startups today. And there is strong confidence in the Indian technology talent pool.

Do you think that with increasing digitization, data privacy is an actual threat?

Yes. If there was one threat that could take the steam off the widespread adoption of technologies, it is issues with data privacy and security. The masses do not and should not need to know what data to be given to whom. Laws around data privacy and security need strengthening at a breakneck pace and infringements of these issues need serious penalizations.

India has been considered the powerhouse of technology and data; how do you think that the current MBAEx batch can make the most out of such opportunities?

With such an explosion of technology, there are ample opportunities to innovate both as technology and as business leaders. MBAEx provides a bridge between these two aspects of leadership and can produce talent ready to take on some of the emerging challenges consumers of these new technologies face today.

A product manager in 2013 vs in 2023, what has changed and how do you see this space pan out in the future?

PMing in the current times has become more versatile. Fast-changing customer preferences, on one hand, rapid pace of technological advancements on the other and a competitive workforce and peers means that PMs need to strike the right balance between how much they want to plan for today versus the future, how they strike the balance between keeping the various

stakeholders happy and on board and how they do all of this while maintaining their well-being as well as career progression. Especially with peers working from home, influencing without authority has become a big challenge for PMs.

What is your key insight to someone wishing to apply for Google?

Google has a very unique process of selection and often preparing to apply for a PM role at Google involves a very specific preparation, very different from applying to a lot of other companies. But as long as the basics are in place and you have the patience to not panic with the long drawn process, you should see yourself through.

It's been nine years since you graduated from IIM Calcutta; what's your favourite campus memory?

I loved the short breaks and our regrouping between two classes for tea served from the mess. Sleepless nights made us all look forward to the tea breaks and also gave us opportunities to get less serious about work and life in general.

What has been your favourite course or extracurricular activity at IIM Calcutta?

I loved the course on organisation structures. Back then, I did not fully understand the importance of having the right organisation structure and aligning people's incentives to the common goal. But in the last nine years, there has never been a time when I felt that any organisation could succeed without the basics of organisation structure being right.

What would be your recommendation to someone wishing to switch their careers to product management? How should they prepare and go about it?

Begin by asking yourself why you want to be a PM. Often this role is glamorised and seen as a mini CEO role. Talk to people who have been PMs for some time to understand what it takes and the pros and cons. Once you have been convinced that this switch is the right way to go, figure out peers who have successfully made the transition similar to what you are gunning for. This will help you understand what potential paths you could take and what mistakes to avoid. These folks should also be your first source of understanding how they bridged any skill gap needed to do the transition. Understanding those gaps can help one chalk a path of how to go about bridging these. Also, try to do some live small projects that give you first-hand experience before you take a full-time plunge.

How did your MBA learnings help you carve your career path?

An MBA not only helped make a business leader out of a software developer but also broadened my horizons through the network it gave me. I chose to be a PM as that was the most natural transition for me from my previous role. It gave me the soft skills to network, rally people, negotiate, build business strategies and then sit in rooms with the CEO defending that through data-driven insights. The case studies in my MBA helped me structure my thoughts and hone my storytelling skills. It gave me the skills to present the same data with different levels of detail and insights in different forums.

Would there be any message that you'd like to pass on to the students of Batch 16?

It is perfectly ok to have a slightly lesser CGPA. I don't even remember mine accurately now. But what I remember is the bonding with my batchmates, the extra-curricular activities outside the projects, the teamwork behind every homework and interactions with the families of my fellow students. Keep the big picture in mind, that helps navigate the way through the bumps.