India Lab: Bangalore

Working toward market expansion

**Michael:** Welcome to another MIT Sloan podcast, I’m Michael Perrone here with my colleague Michelle Choate and joining us today is Katie Baron, welcome Katie.

**Katie:** Thank you.

**Michael:** And Katie is here to talk to us about India Lab. Would you care to share with us a little bit of what India Lab is for people who don’t know?

**Katie:** Sure, this is a project that I became involved in. I guess the application process the middle of last semester, so I guess October, November. And then the projects really kicked about February, starting the spring semester. And with worked with a company based in Bangalore, India for approximately four months and actually had the opportunity to go to India and be on site for two weeks during the semester. The company is called Adaa, and they’re an IT solutions firm. And so there are a team of four of us from MIT who worked with them over the course of the semester.

**Michael:** Who were your teammates?

**Katie:** So I worked with Woody Yao, and Greg Sniders, and Kristen Hughdorfer. So the four of us we were all MBA 2010.

**Michael:** And what was the goal of the project?

**Katie:** Sure, there were two main parts to the project. The first was to do an in-depth analysis of their client perceptions as well as prospect perceptions. So a little bit of market research for them, and then the second part was that they were looking to actually expand into the Boston market. So they wanted us to do a market analysis, market sizing for them to see if that would be a viable option for them moving forward.

**Michelle:** Now did any of you have, any of you, your teammates have any background in this area, you know, prior to coming to MIT Sloan or was it new to all of you, or some of you?

**Katie:** That was actually one of the things that attracted us to this project, was that we didn’t have experience. Three of the four of us had never been to India. And all four of us didn’t have any IT experience so it took us little bit of time at the beginning to get up to speed in terms of IT, what IT solutions are, outsourcing, just the entire business itself. So that was a really interesting learning experience for us, plus in part with this lab there was also a course that we took where we learned a lot about both India and
China. We would read a case on India and China each class so we could compare and contrast the two countries. And that was a great way to learn a little bit more about India since none of us, or three of us hadn’t been there and didn’t know a lot about the country.

Michelle: Now is there anything, you know that sometimes in some of these projects when you’re in the classroom and you’re learning about the company you might think in a scope or solutions in one way that sometimes when you get over to the country and you’re working there, things change or you realize that maybe you have to go in a different direction. Was there any of that for you all?

Katie: There were definitely some scope changes. When we had initially kicked off the project there going to be about four different components to the project. But a semester goes pretty quickly and so we definitely had to re-scope the project a little bit. And then when we got India we realized that, you know, what they wanted to look into was a little bit different. They wanted us to do more interviews with clients, and less of other areas of the project that we had originally thought we would focus on. But it ended up being a great project and it was easy to re-scope.

Michael: Was there an outcome to the project? Like is there a plan going forward that you think will work?

Katie: Sure, we actually presented to the CEO this past Monday. We did a PowerPoint presentation. He’s actually based in Dallas, which is where they’re headquartered. And so we presented to him about the market research, the strengths and weaknesses that we determined from the clients, as well as some of our suggestions in terms of entering the Boston market. And I don’t think it’s confidential at all but they’ve decided to actually go ahead with the expansion and come into the Boston market. So that was a great outcome sort of from the project and also what they’ve been working on internally as a company.

Michael: Now I need challenges dealing with a project based in India.

Katie: Sure, it was a lot for us to adapt to. We hadn’t lived in India before until we were living in a guest house there. We were doing the commute to and from work everyday, we were in a conference room from nine to five, it was a wonderful experience, but there was definitely a lot to learn I guess in terms of entering any company, let alone an Indian-based firm. So we really, it took us a little bit of time just to get used to, to get to know the people and the culture of this company, but we had just a wonderful time. You know, you dealt with the traffic every morning, less than a five mile commute would actually take us about 45 minutes to get there and we would eat with all the employees, you know, we would eat on the roof, have a great Indian food buffet for lunch. It was a wonderful experience but there was definitely a learning curve, not just because it was Indian but just any company in general.

Michelle: Now as part of the class work that you did beforehand, is there, is the bid of pride about say the culture or the wee businesses down in that country as opposed to
in the U.S.?

**Katie:** There is, we spent a lot of time focus on different industries and how the industries work and the impact of the country and why they work or don’t work in that particular country. We also learned a lot about the history, so sort of broader things that we really didn’t need to learn, but there were definitely some lessons about the culture and attitudes from the case studies. We read a lot of cases where we learned about, you know, different founders of companies, CEOs and how they dealt with issues, problems, employees, growth, things of that nature.

**Michelle:** Now you’re a first year MBA, correct?

**Katie:** Correct!

**Michelle:** So if given the opportunity, is this something that you would take part in, India Lab again, or China Lab, or maybe do a G-Lab or something? Would you focus on India because you’d already been there?

**Katie:** Sure, this program is actually one of the reasons I came to Sloan. It was a huge differentiator for me. When I first applied to MIT, I had actually been part of a focus group for China Lab and that really stood out to me, that experience was wonderful. And the hands-on learning that MIT offers was a huge differentiator when I made my decision to come to Sloan. And so I knew right from the beginning that I wanted to be involved in either India or China Lab. I also am planning to apply for G-Lab. I’m going to hopefully get into G-Lab Latin America and then next year I would definitely like to do China Lab. While I would love to go back to India, I still want a, I want a different experience at this point. I haven’t been to mainland China before and so I would love to do that.

**Michelle:** You touched on this a little bit earlier but would you say that being able to go out in the field, if there’s an opportunity to do that for every class that that would really be something of value added, you know, beyond the classroom experience?

**Katie:** I think it’s a great compliment to our education. I don’t necessarily think that every class should have a component because it does take a lot of time and resources. But for me I think having at least one or two classes where we do have a hands-on going out into the community experience really adds a lot. We do that for Organizational Processes, the OP class, that’s part of the core semester, we all work with a company. My core team actually worked with Zappos, which is headquartered in Las Vegas. So we went out there and had a hands-on experience during core semester. So, and there are other things such as Market Lab where you get to work with companies as well. And I think that these are such unique opportunities, these companies are really excited and willing to work with MIT students and really reach out the community to set up these projects and are great to work with and give us access to all their resources and are very open to us. So I think it’s something that I might not have had the opportunity to do going somewhere else and that I’ve really benefitted from.
Michelle: Did you have much opportunity to interact or meet alumni as part of the India Lab is there any component with that or alumni that work with any of the companies?

Katie: Sure, actually it’s funny that you ask that because the CEO of Adaa is a fellow, was a Sloan fellow. So he actually really likes the Sloan community and has done G-Lab previously I think for maybe three years in the past. And so he really tied to Sloan and really supports the India Lab program.

Michelle: Alright well thank you very much for coming in and best of luck with your work this summer and take care.

Katie: Thank you very much.