



IT: potential beyond borders

GPIT official talks about how candidates can build a career in the IT sector

SUMAN SAHA

SYEDA Yasmin Rahman, chief people officer of GPIT, a subsidiary of Grameenphone, boasts a career in different roles. Prior to joining her current role, she has worked at Grameenphone as general manager for the people and organisation division. She has also worked for the United Nations and the French Embassy.

Syeda holds an MBA from IBA and a master's degree in marketing from Dhaka University. She also holds a diploma from Norwegian School of Management from Oslo. She recently talks to The Daily Star on the company's recruitment procedures and talent development mechanisms. She also shares her thoughts on the prospects of a career in the IT sector. She offers some tips for job aspirants wishing to do well in the sector.

What are the services that GPIT provides to its customers?

GPIT started its journey in early 2010 with an aim to become the most reliable Bangladeshi IT company, providing the best value solutions both locally and globally. Our mission is to help transform businesses through the best IT solutions to reach new peaks in productivity and efficiency.

Our product and service portfolio includes infrastructure solutions and services, and communication solutions like unified solutions; telecom application; managed hosting services; and contact centre solutions. We are also offering core banking and mobile banking solutions. Our business support solution includes ERP, CRM, and HRMS -- just to name a few. We also have many custom made products, which help transform an organisation from a paper based office to a paperless one. Our own office is an example of that. Our strength is of course being in the telecommunications sector for more than 13 years as part of Grameenphone.

What are the qualities you look for before hiring people?

We recruit the 'best fit'. Along with specific job-related competencies, experience and other skills, we look for a person who would match GPIT's vision, values, and leadership expectations. In other words, we not only hire skills and competences but also look carefully at what people bring in as a person. Therefore, personality, values, and the candidate's mind-set should match our culture and team environment.

The criteria for every position would include matching the role profile, merits, academic qualifications, experience requirements (where applicable) and some other additional skill requirements. When it comes to educational qualifications, our minimum requirement is graduation. We also recruit diploma engineers in certain positions in the regional operations.

The IT professionals would mostly be from the computer science discipline or "3Es". For other areas like human resources, finance, or marketing, we have employees coming in from other disciplines such as BBA, MBA, finance,



Syeda Yasmin Rahman

HR, international relations or a combination of engineering and business. Hence, the range is quite wide for any intake.

What are the career prospects of the sector?

The information technology (IT) sector has huge business globally. The global technology companies are increasingly more interested in Bangladesh because it is an emerging market and the cost of production compared to some other countries is affordable. So, it is a big opportunity for us if we want to look beyond borders.

Our government is also proactively opting for IT solutions and declared its mission for a 'Digital Bangladesh'. So, there is a great need for IT services for local companies in all sectors. We believe this creates an opportunity for growth and that means anyone delving into the sector will enjoy career growth as well.

What attributes does a job aspirant need to have to build a career in the sector?

In addition to the right competences, it is important to have the right attitude. One has to be able to transform a problem into a solution. Business insight is also important because it helps to understand how information technology can help improve efficiency. Bangladesh is full of opportunities, the one who is creative enough to tap those will move ahead.

What are the company recruitment policies and procedures?

Our recruitment needs are derived from people planning in line with business needs. We encourage a winning culture and professional excellence in our organisation. GPIT does not compromise on selection standards and so, the company uses objective selection methods to make sound hiring decisions.

Different media platforms are used to post

job openings, such as career web sites, newspapers and occasionally on-campus hiring. A competency based interview is carried out. Role play, simulation and case studies are also used to assess candidates. A holistic view is taken before final selection, which includes academic background, screening interview, written exam, experience (total work experience and area of work), assessment result, and personal reference feedback. After satisfactory results, a candidate is appointed.

What is the company's stance on hiring fresh graduates?

A significant portion of our employees join as fresh graduates. We look at their credentials, educational institute and personal traits. Once they join, they start learning on the job and the leaders help them through coaching and feedback.

Do you offer any part-time employment opportunities for students?

Our parent company Grameenphone has students working part time. In GPIT we currently do not have any, but we are discussing with some universities on ways we would build industrial attachment. This also means opportunities for students to work part time in GPIT.

We also offer internship programmes to students coming from different universities. They can stay with us for a period of 3 months and learn and complete their academic requirements. This is also a good way to learn about an organisation.

What are the differences seen between IT professions in Bangladesh than those in other neighboring countries?

Our neighboring country India has done a fabulous job in creating resources in the IT sector. It was possible because they have institu-

tions, like Indian Institute of Technology, for many years now. Having the right supply of resources both in terms of quantity and quality is important for the growth of a sector.

Bangladesh loses a lot of resources right after graduation due to brain drain. It is a challenge to attract these resources to stay in Bangladesh and work. So, we have to create demand and show the potential of this sector to these young people. On the other hand, a relationship between the industry and the education institution should also be there, so that classroom lessons are more relevant and up-to-date.

How does the company develop and nurture the talent pool?

Our biggest strength is our people. Our talent management process provides the management team a platform to discuss the performance and potential of the leaders and experts.

Through well-rounded feedback from the management team, a holistic development plan for an individual (leaders and experts both) is created and followed through. Categorisation of individuals according to their performance potential is also done.

The talent pool is considered whenever an opportunity arises. More focus is given on high potential leaders and individuals who are in critical roles. We have quite a number of initiatives to nurture the talent pool, such as the Telenor accelerate leadership programme, expand programme, basic and advance leadership programme. We also provide educational grants to qualifying employees who would like to pursue higher studies.

Why is training and development important for a company?

Our development or learning approach is done through a 3E model -- it stands for education, exposure and experience. This model is a well-rounded approach to people development aligned with the strategic direction of the company to increase organisational capabilities and effectiveness. This model focuses more on effective methods of development: experience and exposure; rather than education only. To ensure optimal people development, experience and exposure is also considered in formulating an employee's development plan. IT technical functional training is something we continue every year based on business needs. To stay competitive in the market, to build capacity aligning with strategic ambitions, it is very important to stay up to date. Hence, development is crucial.

What would you suggest job-aspirants wishing to build a successful career in the IT sector?

I would say that this sector has great potential. Dream big and work at it keeping a long term vision and prepare for it. Bring innovative ideas and be creative as well. It is always good to have a coach or mentor for career guidance. Don't limit yourself by looking for a job only; think whether the job will fulfil your dreams. If you have done something that you are proud of -- let the organisations know.

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Career prospects in IT brighten

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NOBODY will disagree with the immense prospects of the IT sector in Bangladesh. The government and private sectors have already undertaken a couple of steps to boost the sector.

Gartner, a leading information technology research and advisory company, rated Bangladesh for the first time as an offshore services location and placed the country among the top 30 destinations for outsourcing, thanks to its good cost proposition.

A good number of world renowned multinational companies are opening their offices in the country as well. Companies like Samsung and AMD have already started their operations in Bangladesh. Samsung opened its R&D centre in Dhaka with a capacity of 1,000 engineers.

Career experts urge prospective job-seekers to build a career in IT as currently, the sector faces a dearth of skilled human resources.

"The prospect of a career in the sector is extremely good as there is a huge demand

of IT professions for the domestic as well as foreign market," says AKM Fahim Mashroor, chief executive officer of bdjobs.com, the country's first on-line job portal.

"We see most job openings coming from the IT sector, as we post the highest number of IT related jobs on the bdjobs.com portal," he adds.

He says, "But the country has a shortage of IT professionals; the sector needs nearly 6000 IT people annually, whereas supply stands at around 4,000 people."

SM Mahabub Alam, director engineering of ReliSource Technologies Ltd, an export oriented software company, says, "Bangladesh can grab a large number of software orders due to its cost competitiveness."

He says most European countries like the Netherlands, Denmark, UK, Germany and other European countries are looking at alternative outsourcing service destinations that can provide IT services, as an alternative to India. Those countries are focusing at Bangladesh.

"If we are able to provide the right resources to that market, we have the chance to grab the same opportunities that go to India," says Alam.



AMRAN HOSSAIN

A woman works at a call centre of Grameenphone in Dhaka.

The total size of the software industry in the country is presently around Tk 1,000 crore, which includes software products, IT services, IT enabled services (ITES), graphic

designs, animation and outsourcing, say industry insiders.

Apart from the highest export destination like USA, other export destinations for

Bangladeshi software products are spread over more than 30 countries, including Canada, Germany, Denmark, Holland, UK, Norway, Sweden, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Australia and India.

A capable IT graduate can start up his or her career at TK 15,000 a month.

Alam says demand of engineers in outsourcing companies is increasing day by day and this demand will increase by at least double by next year.

He says ReliSource -- that exports software mostly to US companies in the areas of embedded systems, mobile phone applications, high tech, telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, finance and entertainment -- hires around 10 engineers a year.

The company also plans to hire 20 to 30 more engineers a year, says Alam.

"Basically, we recruit computer science engineering graduates as well as electrical and mechanical engineers," he adds.

The bdjobs chief also suggests IT students to remain up to date on new technology through on-line and academic study.

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