CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN HUMANITARIAN AID AND RELIEF

Description of the Field
The less developed parts of our world are plagued by famine, malnutrition, poor water quality, and poor sanitation, as well as AIDS, TB, malaria, and other deadly diseases. These problems frequently overlap, particularly in the poorest regions of Africa, India, and South America; when combined with weak education systems, corruption, or civil war, these problems become even more difficult to solve. In addition to health and social dilemmas, extreme weather conditions also greatly harm the global poor. A region with drought or flood conditions will be unable to effectively grow crops and oftentimes the starving citizens will even resort to eating their seed stocks – hurting the next year’s planting season and reinforcing the cycle of poverty and suffering. While the Western world only reads about or sees these horrific humanitarian situations on TV, they are everyday reality for many millions of our fellow human beings.

Humanitarian relief is an extraordinarily complex subject involving many actors, including governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) such as United Nations agencies, which seek to respond simultaneously to natural disasters (e.g. earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes) and/or complex emergencies (e.g. war and other violent conflicts). These actors bring life-saving skills and technologies to re-establish basic services such as water and sanitation, set up schools, and provide food and medical supplies.

Career Paths
A multitude of organizations – non-profits, for-profits, government, and international organizations – provide humanitarian assistance internationally. With such a variety and breadth of organizations involved, there is no preset career path in the humanitarian aid and relief field. Starting salaries can be lower for positions in the humanitarian field than for positions in the international development field.

Students should keep in mind the fact that many humanitarian groups are not operating solely under emergency conditions. These days many humanitarian groups also compete for follow-on development activities, once the immediate disaster is under control. Often they will have an advantage over non-humanitarian groups, since the humanitarian aid organizations already know local conditions. So a student starting out with a humanitarian NGO may be able to take advantage of development opportunities downstream. International Relief and Development (IRD), CHF International, and Mercy Corps are only three examples of NGOs carrying out both humanitarian and development work in the Third World.

Demand
The environment where humanitarian action takes place is evolving rapidly and continually poses new challenges to the humanitarian community. There is increasing human vulnerability in crisis situations – both in natural disasters (200 million affected in 2003) and in complex emergencies (45 million in need of life-saving assistance in 2003).
The last decade has seen a marked increase in the occurrence of natural disasters along with exposure to greater levels of loss of life, property, and material damage. The lives of millions of people are at risk each time an earthquake, hurricane, or other natural disaster occurs, particularly in poor countries with less developed infrastructures, high population densities, and inadequate emergency preparedness. (http://ochaonline.un.org/) There is clearly a high demand for professionals to respond to such crises; there are growing numbers of opportunities for administrators, fund raisers, grant writers, program organizers, teachers, researchers, policy analysts, and others.

Qualifications Necessary to Enter the Field

A master’s degree in public administration or in international development, a dedication to making the world a better place to live, and a desire to serve others by doing good works are all necessary qualifications to enter this field. An expertise in one of the key technical areas including food security, public health, nutrition, logistics, or conflict resolution is strongly recommended to effectively and permanently solve issues which arise when disaster occurs. Candidates must also demonstrate business acumen, personal diplomacy, and basic toughness. Other necessary qualifications for some positions include two or three years of experience in the developing world and the requisite foreign language requirement.

Sample Group of Employers

Africare - http://www.africare.org/
Alpha Charitable Foundation - http://www.alphainc.org/alpha_charitable_index.htm
American Red Cross - http://www.redcross.org/
AmeriCares - http://www.americares.org/
Amy Biehl Foundation - http://www.amybiehl.org/
Association François-Xavier Bagnoud - http://www.fxb.org/
CARE - www.care.org
Catholic Relief Services - http://crs.org/
Christian Friends of Korea - http://www.cfk.org/
Church World Service - http://www.churchworldservice.org/
Direct Relief International - http://www.directrelief.org/
Doctors without Borders - http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/
Volunteer Organizations

Center for Humanitarian Outreach and Intercultural Exchange - www.choicehumanitarian.org/about/

Cross-Cultural Solutions - http://www.crossculturalsolutions.org/

Dakshinayan - http://www.dakshinayan.org/


Peace Corps - http://www.peacecorps.gov/


Future Challenges of the Profession

There are always new issues in public health that must be dealt with, such as the SARS epidemic, the recent H1N1 outbreaks, and extreme weather conditions, like those that caused the 2005 Tsunami, that continue to bring new
social and public health issues to affected countries. In addition, the challenges to overcoming poverty and disease are also viewed as dynamic and ongoing.

Resources for Additional Information

**Internet Resources**

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) - [http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/index-e.htm](http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/index-e.htm) - supports sustainable development in developing countries and this site includes information on employment at CIDA and its related organizations.

DevNetJobs.org - [http://www.devnetjobs.org/](http://www.devnetjobs.org/) - is a gateway to job listings in international development, environment, information technology for development, relief and reconstruction, and consultancy assignments.

GlobalCorps - [http://www.globalcorps.com/](http://www.globalcorps.com/) - matches development, humanitarian, and disaster relief professionals with organizations looking for these individuals. The organization helps recruit for The Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), the office within USAID that is responsible for providing non-food humanitarian assistance in response to international crises and disasters.

Idealist.org [http://www.idealist.org/](http://www.idealist.org/) - is a project of Action Without Borders and contains job listings in economic development, social services, human rights, environment, and more. Users can search for jobs and internships by country, state, and city.

Interaction - [http://www.interaction.org/](http://www.interaction.org/) - is the largest alliance of U.S.-based international development and humanitarian nongovernmental organizations, with more than 160 members operating in every developing country.


Job Vacancies - [www.intjobs.org](http://www.intjobs.org) - A tool to assist job-seekers in their search for international employment at organizations such as the UN, International Criminal Court, International Labour Organization, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, World Bank, and World Health Organization.


Public Health Jobs Worldwide - [http://www.jobspublichealth.com/](http://www.jobspublichealth.com/) - lists most of its jobs and internships in the organization's newspaper, although some jobs are listed on their website.

OneWorld International Foundation - [http://us.oneworld.net/jobs](http://us.oneworld.net/jobs) - offers job and internship listings at non-profit and international organizations dedicated to harnessing the democratic potential of the Internet to promote human rights and sustainable development.

Relief.org - [http://www.relief.org/](http://www.relief.org/) - provides information on and links to humanitarian aid websites; it allows users to access the Idealist.org site to search for humanitarian jobs worldwide.
ReliefWeb - [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/dbc.nsf/doc100?openForm](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/dbc.nsf/doc100?openForm) - run by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, it provides international job listings at nonprofits dedicated to humanitarian relief, conflict resolution, health, and more.

US Department of State - [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov) - lists the categories of State Department employees and how to apply for these positions.


**Publications**


CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN HUMAN RIGHTS

Description of Field

The international human rights field is comprised of a broad spectrum of governmental, intergovernmental, and non-governmental organizations focused on the alleviation of human suffering and the protection and promotion of human rights. Careers address the full spectrum of human rights: economic, social, cultural, political, and civil. The field of human rights overlaps with key issue areas of peace and security, development, law, humanitarian assistance, and economic and social affairs.

Work in human rights can be challenging and intense. Organizations use a variety of disciplines in their approach to social justice, including direct service, advocacy, policy development, and research. Activities include research focusing on preventing and ending human rights abuses throughout the world, monitoring human rights development, conducting on-site investigations, writing reports on human rights conditions, engaging in advocacy to publicize and curtail human rights violations, litigation, lobbying, and promoting human rights practices in social and political structures. In addition, human rights professionals provide advisory and educational services, refugee assistance, policy analysis for national and international institutions, assistance in institution building, and economic development monitoring.

Career Paths and Entry Salaries

The field of human rights is broad and multidisciplinary; therefore, there is no direct or specific career path to follow. Over the past 25 years, the variety of career opportunities in human rights has broadened to include grassroots/community organizers, media specialists, grant writers, educators, financial analysts, journalists, researchers, health care professionals, and human rights monitors. The energy behind human rights work is often found in local/indigenous grassroots groups. Support for these groups can be provided in the form of technical assistance, research, or training.

Although the field is relatively competitive to enter, there are many entry-level opportunities for job seekers with a Bachelor’s degree interested in this area of social justice. Possible positions include assistant project coordinator, researcher, communications assistant, development associate, and community organizer.

Positions for candidates with a relevant master’s degree are most frequently in the capacity of monitoring, reporting, administrative, and organizational efforts and can include titles such as program manager, analyst, research associate, writer/reporter, regional monitor, and legal advocate.

Advanced positions can include positions such as executive director, project administrator, senior program director, and legal counsel. Depending on the size and type of organization, senior-level employees can have a salary anywhere from
the low-$30,000s to over $100,000. A law degree or a background in an overlapping field is often required for senior-level employment.

**Demand**

Paid positions in the human rights field are increasing, but are still very restricted for young professionals. The jobs that do exist can be found primarily with non-governmental organizations or, in some cases, with the federal government. There are opportunities in other fields which might overlap with human rights such as governmental affairs, law, and lobbying. There are also short-term positions for those on leave from other jobs who might want to lend their expertise to the human rights arena, i.e. lawyers, teachers, social workers, and doctors. Domestic careers in human rights include work with refugees who have emigrated to the US, civil rights, and women’s issues.

**Qualifications Necessary to Enter the Field**

The skills required to work in the human rights field vary depending on the organization and type of work. Human rights advocates must be skilled in research, writing, analytical thinking, public speaking, and/or grassroots organizing. Those working in policy development, legal cases, or complex international treaties typically require an advanced degree in law, medicine, anthropology, or something similar.

Regardless of the individual requirements of human rights organizations, all candidates should possess excellent oral and written communication skills, foreign language proficiency, cross-cultural skills, flexibility, and a willingness to carry out a wide range of responsibilities with limited resources. Experience living and working abroad, especially in a developing country, is highly recommended. Internships with human rights organizations are one way to gain valuable experience while also providing professional contacts in the human rights community. In many cases, internships lead directly or indirectly to full-time jobs. It is also helpful, if not critical, to be familiar with primary human rights documents and declarations such as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Convention to Eliminate all Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

In addition to skills, knowledge, and experience, a career in human rights requires keen dedication and commitment to social justice. Due to the intensity of human rights work, it is crucial to have a desire to make a difference, in addition to having the ability to work collaboratively with other agencies, groups, and cultures.

**Sample Group of Employers**

Amnesty International - http://www.amnesty.org/

The Carter Center - http://www.cartercenter.org
Future Challenges of the Profession
The magnitude of human rights challenges today far exceeds the capacity of global organizations and institutions to address them. Both the difficulty of enforcing human rights standards and the inadequate resources given to the United Nations to address peacekeeping in war-torn nations contribute to the problems of the human rights movement.

The challenges ahead are dealing with the intractable problems of poverty and the lack of health care in both the developed and lesser developed world. Increasingly, there is a link between international development initiatives and
human rights, as aid is being tied to issues of democracy and governance. Problems of ethnic conflicts, causes and
problems of refugee flows, human rights in nations’ foreign policies, women’s rights, and related issues will increasingly
be areas of major concern in the human rights field.

There are challenges inherent to the nature of international human rights work that affect those working in the field.
Living and/or traveling abroad can be both exciting and challenging. Employees may be separated from familiar
surroundings and relationships for long periods of time and may be living in conditions far inferior to what they are used
to in the United States. For positions requiring extensive travel, it can be hard to maintain family relationships or enjoy
regular personal activities.

Resources for Additional Information

Internet Resources

AAAS Science and Human Rights Program - http://shr.aaas.org
Action Without Borders (Idealist) - http://www理想ist.org
Human Rights Internet - http://www.hri.ca/
Human Rights Organizations and Resources - http://www.hrweb.org/resource.html
Human Rights Resource Center - http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/default.shtm
Human Rights Information and Documentation System International - http://www.huridocs.org/
OneWorld.net - http://us.oneworld.net/
Relief Web - http://www.reliefweb.int/
University of Minnesota Human Rights Library - http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/

Publications

Human Rights Organizations and Periodicals Directory, Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute, published annually.
CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Description of the Field

The goal of international development is to alleviate poverty in developing countries. Strategies for improvement include investment in the economic, political, and social arenas. Economic development ranges from the creation of sound macro-economic and fiscal policy to the fostering of small and medium enterprise to the introduction or expansion of microfinance. It also involves identifying and creating the necessary infrastructure, energy, transportation, and sanitation for economic growth through the provision of technical assistance and access to capital. Political development focuses on the creation and fostering of democratic governance, including transparent financial systems, modern electoral/political processes, the rule of law, and the active participation of civil society and independent media. Social development focuses on the improvement of health, education, and the social safety net. Each of these areas is interrelated and interdependent. International development is inherently a global issue and necessarily a highly multidisciplinary field.

Readers will note that while international development includes many sectors as described above, a number of sectors are broken out separately in this guide under their own headings – to provide more detail on desired qualifications and potential employers. These are Environmental Sustainability, Global Health, Humanitarian and Relief, International Education, Microfinance, and Peace and Conflict Resolution.

Career Paths and Qualifications

There are two essential credentials preparatory to a career in international development. One is a master’s degree: it can be in international relations/international development, area studies (e.g., Latin America, Arab studies, etc.), public health, public administration, economics, business administration, or even law. The other is prior work experience in a developing country, ideally for at least two years. The Peace Corps would be an excellent choice, but any overseas employer, such as an NGO or for-profit firm, would do just as well. The importance of previous overseas work experience in a developing country cannot be over-emphasized for graduate students seeking to break into the development field.
Graduate students have another option for acquiring work experience in a developing country. Students can arrange for an overseas internship during the summer between their first and second year of graduate school. Enterprising graduates sometimes can work in a second overseas internship before graduation. In most cases, the graduate school will pay for a significant chunk of the student’s expenses while abroad. Such internships can go a long way towards establishing students’ work credentials in developing countries. Internships can also be a springboard to long-term employment following graduation. Unfortunately, study abroad carries much less weight with employers, compared to overseas work experience.

Language skills are highly prized by international development recruiters. For the moment, Arabic and Farsi are perhaps the two most highly sought languages. But French, Spanish, and Russian will always be valuable, as well as lesser known languages such as Swahili and Indonesian.

Candidates with a master's degree may consider employment in government agencies of their home country, public international organizations (PIOs) or with implementing partners in the non-profit and private sectors. Foundations and policy institutes that conduct research and advocacy to influence development policy are also potential employers. A significant proportion of development professionals will work in at least two of the three sectors (public, private, and nonprofit) over the course of their careers. The field is characterized by fluidity and high travel demands. Many professionals travel as much as 40 percent of the time. As such, it is important to consider family issues prior to entering the field.

For master’s degree candidates interested in working for a PIO, there are different paths to employment. Formalized management training programs include the IFC Global Transaction Team Program (GTT), the World Bank Young Professionals Program (YPP), and the UNDP Leadership Development Programme (LEAD). These centralized recruitment programs are extremely competitive, with thousands of applications submitted for each program, which, on average, hire between 20 to 40 candidates each year. Posted vacancies are also published on the website of each organization, which typically require specialized skill sets and several years of related development experience. Most recent graduates have more success breaking into the field on a short-term contract basis. Hiring for contract positions is decentralized, which gives those who network effectively the advantage in finding these often unpublished opportunities.

Other Qualifications Necessary to Enter the Field

For individuals with significant work experience, a graduate degree offers the chance to fine-tune skills, gain exposure to other sectors and reflect on policy issues. Sound training in economics and public administration, including policy monitoring and evaluation may be broadly applied. In addition, given the interdisciplinary nature of the field, joint degrees or consecutive training in related disciplines such as law and economics or health and economics, are valuable. Furthermore, an MBA may be applied in the development field through the private sector, banking, and finance.
Employers typically hire new candidates based on the candidate's strong skill set in a particular sector (including things such as political party training, child nutrition, and micro-finance) or regional specialization (consisting of language skills, regional work experience, or area studies).

Sample Group of Employers

While there is high fluidity between organizations in the development world, candidates should consider which aspect of development best matches their interests (ex. political development, agricultural policy, education, community development, etc.). Many of the international NGOs (Mercy Corps, International Rescue Committee, Catholic Relief Services, etc.) are oriented towards both community/civil society development and humanitarian relief and therefore offer more opportunities for grassroots work experience. NGOs such as the National Democratic Institute, International Republican Institute, and IFES are more focused on democracy and governance, and frequently work in the fields of political party development, electoral reform, and voter education. There are even more specialized fields such as media development (ex. Internews), education (AMIDEAST), and children's health (e.g., Save the Children and UNICEF), to name but a few.

US government agencies such as USAID offer a broad range of work possibilities: e.g., democracy and governance, education, agriculture, environment, health, private sector development, small and medium enterprise development, microenterprise/microfinance, conflict resolution, and humanitarian assistance. USAID hires entry level Foreign Service Officers through the USAID website (not through the State Department’s Foreign Service Test) and junior-level Civil Service employees through the Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) program.

The Millenium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is the newest US government foreign aid agency, created by Congress in 2004. It forms partnerships with some of the world’s poorest countries, but only those committed to good governance, economic freedom, and investments in their citizens. So far the MCC has hired an impressive number of graduate students, both as interns and as follow-on full-time employees.

Employees of USAID-supported contractors and NGOs such as DAI, Chemonics, International Relief & Development (IRD) and World Learning are expected to have similarly diverse fields of expertise, depending on the focus of the project.

Public International Organizations (PIOs)

EuropeAid - http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/index_en.htm
Inter-American Development Bank - http://www.iadb.org/
UNICEF - http://www.unicef.org/
World Food Programme - http://www.wfp.org/

United States Government
United States Agency for International Development (USAID) - http://www.usaid.gov/
Millenium Challenge Corporation - http://www.mcc.gov/
Department of State - http://www.state.gov/

For-Profit Development Firms
Development Alternatives Inc. - http://www.dai.com/
Environmental Resources Management - http://www.erm.com/
International Resources Group – http://www.irgltd.com
AECOM - http://www.aecom.com/
The Pragma Corporation - http://www.pragmacorp.com/
Tetratech ARD - http://ardinc.com
University Research Co. - http://urc-chs.com
Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Accion International - http://www.accion.org/
Ashoka - http://www.ashoka.org/
Asia Foundation - http://asiafoundation.org/
CARE USA - http://www.care.org/
Catholic Relief Services - http://www.crs.org/
CHF International - http://www.chfinternational.org
International Relief & Development - http://www.ird.org
International Republican Institute - http://www.iri.org
Management Sciences for Health - http://www.msh.org/
Mercy Corps - http://www.mercycorps.org/
National Democratic Institute - http://www.ndi.org/
Oxfam America - http://www.oxfamamerica.org/
Oxfam International - http://www.oxfam.org/
Pact - http://www.pactworld.org/
Partners of the Americas - http://www.partners.net/partners/Default_EN.asp
Save the Children - http://www.savethechildren.org/
World Learning - http://www.worldlearning.org/

Foundations, Policy Institutes

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation - http://www.gatesfoundation.org/Pages/home.aspx
Brookings - http://www.brookings.edu/
Future Challenges of the Profession

The flow of funds to development is governed principally by the policy priorities of governments in industrialized societies and the willingness to fund those priorities. Among NGOs in industrialized countries, there continues to be a significant shift in emphasis from direct delivery of services in the field to capacity building and sustainability through collaboration with local implementing partners in developing countries.

Resources for Additional Information

Associations

Association of Women in Development - http://www.awid.org/
InterAction - http://www.interaction.org/

Internet Resources

Inter-American Development Bank Job Listings - http://www.iadb.org/vacancies_scholarships/index.cfm?lang=en - Provides a list of 1,500 volunteer organizations in Latin America, containing both job descriptions and contact information.

Avue Central - https://www.avuedigitalservices.com/- A federal employment service to find and apply for federal jobs and internships.

The Association for Women's Rights in Development - http://www.awid.org/eng/Jobs - An international organization committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development, and women's rights. The website features job listings around the world in these fields.

Directory of Development Orgs - http://www.devdir.org/ - Online directory of development organizations which contains over 65,000 listings by country and is a reference for development practitioners, researchers, donor employees, and policymakers.

Development Net - http://devnetjobs.tripod.com/- A gateway to job listings in international development, environment, information technology for development, relief and reconstruction, and consultancy assignments.

The Foreign Policy Association - http://www.fpa.org/jobs_contact2423/jobs_contact.htm - Provides job and internship listings on its website and in a weekly email newsletter from industries such as development, health, environment, education, humanitarian relief, and more.

Idealist - www.idealist.org - A project of Action without Borders, containing job and internship listings in economic development, social services, human rights, environment, and more. Users can search for jobs by country, state, and city.

InterAction - www.interaction.org - An alliance of international development and humanitarian nongovernmental organizations.

International Job Center - http://www.internationaljobs.org/- Lists international development jobs and internships in all sectors of the market around the world.

Nonprofitjobs.org - http://www.nonprofitjobs.org/ - Run by the Community Career Center, an on-line gathering place for non-profit employers and management personnel; the site allows users to search for non-profit jobs and internships regionally in the US and internationally.

OneWorld International Foundation - http://us.oneworld.net/jobs - Offers job and internship listings at non-profit and international organizations dedicated to harnessing the democratic potential of the Internet to promote human rights and sustainable development.


U.S. Dept Of State - http://www.state.gov/careers/ - A lists the categories of State department employees and how to apply for these positions.


Publications


State of the World 2010, A Worldwatch Institute report on Transforming Cultures: From Consumerism to Sustainability


CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN MICROFINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT FINANCE

Description of Field

Microfinance is a term for a variety of financial services that target low-income clients, particularly women who have meager incomes and lack access to formal financial services. The services provided by microfinance institutions (MFIs) include loans, savings, insurance, and remittances. Microlaons are given for a variety of purposes, including microenterprise development, smoothing consumption, and managing risk. The diversity of products and services offered by MFIs reflects the fact that the financial needs of individuals, households, and enterprises can change significantly over time, especially for those who live in poverty. Due to these varied needs, and because of the industry’s focus on the poor, microfinance institutions often use non-traditional methodologies, such as group lending or other forms of collateral not employed by the formal financial sector.

Career Paths and Entry Salaries

As a less established but emerging field in finance, those seeking a career in microfinance will have to create their own career paths. With that in mind, it is generally advised to first obtain the necessary financial skills, experience, and networking in more traditional financial institutions before then seeking microfinance opportunities either with an MFI or within the microfinance division of a larger financial organization. Entry salaries are typically lower than similar positions in more mainstream financial careers.

Demand

The microfinance industry is a steadily growing sector, with MFIs currently operating in over 100 countries and serving more than 100 million clients. Microfinance has an estimated total loan volume of $25 billion, yet this is but a fraction of the roughly $250 billion possible if the demand of 1 billion micro-borrowers were met. (Deutsche Bank Research) As MFIs grow to meet this demand, career opportunities will increase for those financial professionals with social science knowledge, local language expertise, and cultural understanding.
Qualifications Necessary to Enter the Field

The ideal candidate will have at least several years of marketing, branding, and delivery experience, preferably in financial services. Successful candidates are expected to provide strategic and operational leadership by working closely with a range of partner organizations, as well as possessing excellent communicative, quantitative, and analytical skills. One must have a passion for building businesses and a commitment to delivering great products even with limited resources. In addition, an MBA is often preferred for those entering the field.

Sample Group of Employers

Accion USA – http://www.accionusa.org/
Citi Microfinance – http://www.citigroup.com/citi/microfinance/
Grameen Foundation – http://www.grameenfoundation.org/
Microfinance Information Exchange – www.mixmarket.org
Micro Place – https://www.microplace.com/

Associations

International Association of Microfinance Investors  http://www.iamfi.com/groups.html
Women Advocating Microfinance (WAM) - http://www.wam-international.org/home

Challenges of the Profession

The success of microfinance brings with it new challenges and situations, as MFIs become more established and complex. Such complications include the increase in competition between MFIs, issues with regulation, inappropriate donor subsidies, limited management capacity, and institutional inefficiencies. (Brigham Young University) In addition, the global recession’s impact on MFIs, the danger of liquidity drying up, credit risks, and extended indebtedness are all issues raised by those wary of microfinance. (Center for the Study of Financial Innovation)

Resources for Additional Information

CGAP Microfinance Gateway - http://www.microfinancegateway.org/p/site/m/


MicroCapital Society, Events - http://microfinanceassociation.ning.com/events


Publications


CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN CONSULTING: MANAGEMENT, STRATEGIC & DEVELOPMENT
FOR NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Description of the Field
Management consultants are professionals who are trained to solve problems, devise strategies, and improve the general health of their clients no matter what the industry. Management consultants help clients solve specific problems that are usually focused on the short-term, while strategy consultants research and develop strategies for attaining the long-term goals of the company. Companies hire consultants not only for their problem solving abilities, but also for their objectivity.

Typically, consultants conduct research, analyze data, prepare reports, and present findings; less frequently a management consultant will become involved in the actual implementation of the plan. Profits are derived from fees to clients, which consequently break down into "billable hours." In general, the work environment is fast-paced, stimulating, and involves long hours. Workweeks of between fifty to seventy-five hours are not unusual.

Management consultants tend to work in teams of three to four individuals with one person assuming the leadership role. Travel is another important aspect of a management consultant's professional life, as spending time with clients on the premises is an essential part of the consultant's responsibilities. If you are working on a management case, you may spend three to four days at the client’s site. It is not unusual for a consultant to fly out every Sunday night and fly home every Friday night until the project is finished.
Career Paths
While different firms have different titles for the same positions, entry-level positions traditionally include:

**Analysts/Research Associates**: These positions are typically filled by undergraduates.

**Associates/Senior Associates**: These positions can be filled by M.A., M.B.A., Ph.D. and J.D. graduates.

The type and amount of work depend on the kind of project the consultants are working on. The three main types of cases are strategy, management (which includes operations and business organization), and systems design.

It is possible for a management consultant to devote an entire career to one company. Beginning at the associate level, an individual can work up to manager, managing director, vice president to partner and/or principal. Some management consultants will focus on one industry, while others will work with a wide array of clients from various sectors.

More typically, after a few years with one consulting company, a management consultant may choose to leave the firm and work for one of his or her clients. In this situation, the management consultant will often assume a strategic planning role for the organization. The possibilities, however, are not limited to this one function.

**Qualifications Necessary to Enter the Field**
Most consulting firms tend to hire people with advanced degrees, such as law, business, and other specialty areas or with some specialized experience. Academic excellence, leadership and team skills developed from extracurricular activities, and private sector experience derived from internships are important in the consideration process. Besides outstanding academic records, firms want people who are problem solvers, creative thinkers, good communicators, and who have a keen understanding of and interest in business. The following qualities are essential for consultants:

- Excellent oral and written communication skills
- Strong analytical abilities (including quantitative methods)
- Attention to detail and deadlines
- Proven leadership capabilities
- High energy and enthusiasm
- Ability to work in teams
- Excitement about consulting
- Success on the “airplane test” — would a colleague want to sit next to you on a long overseas flight?
- Interpersonal skills
**Application and Interview Procedures**

The recruitment staff in the top management consultant firms play a major role in the application process. Interested candidates should inquire about each firm's deadlines and forward resumes and cover letters accordingly. The traditional time-line starts with information sessions in the early fall and interviews beginning as early as October and concluding as late as April. Apply to a consulting firm earlier rather than later in the academic year, and always keep in mind that personal, professional, and alumni contacts can be very helpful when trying to get hired by a management consulting firm.

Depending on which firm a candidate is applying to, two to three rounds of interviews will be held. The first interviews are with one or two members of the recruitment team. Recruitment teams are comprised of line staff from varying levels that rotate on and off recruitment duty. One interview will usually be a "fit" interview and the other a "case" interview.

The "fit" interview is generally a discussion about the candidate's background and experience. This part of the interview process offers the applicant an opportunity to demonstrate important characteristics such as leadership, innovation, and creativity through the stories and examples that he or she decides to discuss.

The "case" interview is highly structured. The applicant will be presented with a business problem and asked to provide a strategy and possible solution in 20-25 minutes. The interviewer is looking to see how the applicant analyzes a problem and how he or she attempts to solve the problem. The interviewer is not looking for technical expertise -- this is truly an evaluation of the applicant’s thought process and ability to analyze. Mock case interviews are strongly encouraged for Master’s degree candidates.

The interviewee should be prepared to demonstrate quantitative skills and highlight leadership skills, all while being a team player. Communication and interpersonal skills are paramount. Is the interviewee engaging and enthusiastic? Does he or she have the poise and sophistication to impress and persuade a client? The interviewers will be asking themselves whether or not they would feel comfortable having you present in front of a client.

**The Case Question**

The most important part of the interview is the case question. Consultants must be able to effectively synthesize large quantities of foreign data, structure an approach to a given client issue, and hypothesize logically and creatively. The case question is designed to test a candidate’s ability to think logically, to determine tolerance for ambiguity and data overload, to observe his/her thought process, to assess poise and communication skills under pressure, and – ultimately – to determine if the candidate would be a good addition to the consulting firm.

For more information on case studies, candidates should read:


Case in Point: Complete Case Interview Preparation (2009), by Burgee Press.


Sample Group of Employers

The Bridgespan Group - http://www.bridgespan.org/


Booz Allen & Hamilton - http://www.boozallen.com


Ernst & Young - http://www.ey.com/GL/en/home

LEK Consulting - http://www.lek.com


Monitor Consulting - http://www.monitor.com


Future Challenges of the Profession

The management consulting industry’s challenges reflect the challenges that are facing today’s leading businesses. Both big and small businesses are looking for new ways to increase profits and decrease costs. When a client company's budget shrinks, the relative cost of a management consultant rises; it is therefore essential for a successful firm or consultant to add noticeable value to their client’s operations and bottom line. The consulting industry has continued to thrive over the
past decade, regardless of the cyclical nature of the economy. The growth of the industry will be driven not just by client
demand, but also by the number of talented persons who decide to work in consulting. (Carland & Farber). Also, as the
market becomes increasingly international, the ability to approach problems from a global perspective will be useful.
Specialized skills such as foreign language fluency and technical knowledge are increasingly important. Furthermore, it is
essential to build contacts by contacting alumni from your school who are working with firms in which you are interested
in order to build your networking infrastructure.

Resources for Additional Information

Associations

Association of Management Consulting Firms - [http://www.amcf.org/amcf/](http://www.amcf.org/amcf/)

Public Relations Society of America - [http://www.prsa.org](http://www.prsa.org)

International Council of Management Consulting Institutes (ICMCI) - [http://www.icmci.org/](http://www.icmci.org/)

Internet Resources


Vault “Consulting” - [www.vault.com](http://www.vault.com)

Wall Street “Career Journal” online - [http://www.careerjournal.com](http://www.careerjournal.com)

Wet Feet - [www.wetfeet.com](http://www.wetfeet.com)

Publications


*In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America’s Best Run Companies*, by Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman,

*Operating Ratios for Management Consulting Firms -- 2005 U.S. Edition*, Association of Management Consulting Firms,
New York, N.Y. (has salary information).